

interzone/85

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

July
1994

New stories by
Barry Bayley
Mary Gentle
Brian Stableford
and others



David Eddings
interview



‘An excellent new fantasy and
an outstanding first novel’ LOCUS

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FUREY
AURIAN



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Book One of *The Artifacts of Power* trilogy



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Typesetting & Paste-up
Bryan Williamson

Subscriptions Secretary
Ann Pringle

Circulation Advisers
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Brighton BN1 6FL, United Kingdom.
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Submissions: stories, in the 2,000-6,000 word range, should be sent singly and each one must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript (marked as such) and two International Reply Coupons. We are unable to reply to writers who do not send return postage. No responsibility can be accepted for loss or damage to unsolicited material, howsoever caused. Submissions should be sent to the main Brighton address, above.

interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 85

July 1994

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Interface

In our January 1994 issue we asked interested readers to vote on their favourite (and least favourite) stories published in these pages during 1993. Fifty-three ballots were received by the deadline, a sufficient number to give a valid result (we have found in the past that after about 50 ballots are counted the results change very little). As usual, we subtracted all negative mentions from positive ones to arrive at the following scores. The "field" of stories last year was 56 strong; but to save space, and embarrassment for those who came at the bottom of the heap, we give just the top 40 or so stories here.

Story Poll Results, 1993

1)	R. Holdstock & G. Kilworth: The Ragthorn	32
2)	Timons Esaias: Norbert and the System	23
3=)	Chris Beckett: The Welfare Man	17
3=)	Ben Jeapes: Crush	17
5=)	Molly Brown: Ruella in Love	16
5=)	Nicola Griffith: Touching Fire	16
7)	Greg Egan: Chaff	15
8=)	Molly Brown: No Better Than Anyone Else	14
8=)	Ben Jeapes: Getting Rid of Teddy	14
8=)	Astrid Julian: Irene's Song	14
11)	John Meaney: Sanctification	13
12)	Fergus Bannon: Burning Bright	12
13=)	Terry Bisson: By Permit Only	11
13=)	Julian Flood: An Occupational Disease	11
13=)	Brian Stableford: Riding the Tiger	11
16=)	William Barton: Slowly Comes a Hungry People	10
16=)	Stephen Baxter: Pilgrim 7	10
16=)	Paul J. McAuley: Dr Luther's Assistant	10
16=)	Jennifer Swift: As We Forgive Our Debtors	10
20=)	Eric Brown: Paramathea	9
20=)	Lawrence Dyer: The 4,000-Year-Old Boy	9
20=)	Greg Egan: Transition Dreams	9
20=)	Jonathan Lethem: A Small Patch on My Contract	9
20=)	Josef Nesvadba: Horribly Beautiful	9
20=)	Kim Newman: The Big Fish	9
26)	Graham Joyce: The Apprentice	8
27=)	John Meaney: Timeslice	7
27=)	Bob Shaw: Alien Porn	7
27=)	William Spencer: Striptease	7
27=)	Don Webb: Castalia	7
27=)	David Wishart: Chronotetannymenicon	7
32=)	Stephen Baxter: Downstream	6
32=)	Stephen Blanchard: The Gravity Brothers	6
32=)	Molly Brown: Learning to Fly	6
32=)	Paul Di Filippo: Walt and Emily	6
36=)	Stephen Baxter: Lieserl	5
36=)	Stephen Baxter: No Longer Touch the Earth	5
36=)	Stephen Baxter: The Sun Person	5
36=)	Bob Shaw: Time to Kill	5

The remaining 17 stories all scored fewer than five points, I'm sorry to say, with the least popular item ending up with -6. Congratulations to **Garry Kilworth** for topping the Interzone poll for the second year running, although this time of course he was writing in collaboration with **Robert Holdstock**. Their story "The Ragthorn" has already won two awards elsewhere, so it was in a sense an unsurprising (although very worthy) winner.

Congratulations also to runners-up **Timons Esaias**, **Chris Beckett** and **Ben Jeapes**, all of them fairly new writers. **Molly Brown**, **Nicola Griffith** and **Greg Egan** also did well, as they have tended to do in previous polls.

Past Poll-Winners

For the information of newer readers, previous Interzone story-poll winners were as follows. (In the early days, when the magazine was quarterly, our polling periods were every four issues but did not cover exact calendar years; from the end of 1988, we "annualized" the poll.)

- 1982-3: Keith Roberts, "Kitemaster"
- 1983-4: Geoff Ryman, "The Unconquered Country"
- 1984-5: J.G. Ballard, "The Object of the Attack"
- 1985-6: Ian Watson, "The People on the Precipice"
- 1986-7: Richard Kadrey, "Goodbye Houston Street, Goodbye"
- 1987-8: David Brin, "The Giving Plague"
- 1988: Eric Brown, "The Time-Lapsed Man"
- 1989: Brian Stableford, "The Magic Bullet"
- 1990: Greg Egan, "Learning to Be Me"
- 1991: Greg Egan, "The Infinite Assassin"
- 1992: Garry Kilworth, "The Sculptor"

Art & Non-Fiction Poll Results

In the following categories, we list only those who scored five or more points. Congratulations to talented poll-toppers **Jim Burns** and **Gerry Grace** (for exterior and interior art, respectively) and **David Langford** (for non-fiction – again!).

Artists – Covers:

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------|----|
| 1) | Jim Burns (#70) | 19 |
| 2) | Mark Harrison (#73) | 14 |
| 3) | Mark Harrison (#68) | 13 |
| 4=) | J.K. Potter (#77) | 12 |
| 4=) | Geoff Taylor (#74) | 12 |
| 6) | Jason Hurst (#67) | 10 |
| 7) | SMS (#76) | 7 |
| 8) | David A. Hardy (#69) | 5 |

Artists – Interiors:

- | | | |
|-----|--------------|----|
| 1) | Gerry Grace | 27 |
| 2) | Jim Burns | 15 |
| 3) | SMS | 9 |
| 4) | Jason Hurst | 7 |
| 5=) | Freddie Baer | 5 |
| 5=) | Kevin Cullen | 5 |

Non-Fiction:

- | | | |
|------|--|----|
| 1) | David Langford: Ansible Link | 27 |
| 2) | Bob Shaw: How to Write SF | 18 |
| 3) | Book reviews in general | 15 |
| 4=) | John Clute: Book Reviews | 13 |
| 4=) | Nick Lowe: Film Reviews | 13 |
| 6) | Ian Watson interview (Crowther) | 12 |
| 7) | Brian Stableford: On Mary Shelley | 11 |
| 8=) | Arthur C. Clarke interview (Nicholls) | 9 |
| 8=) | Interaction: Readers' Letters | 9 |
| 8=) | Frederik Pohl interview (Nicholls) | 9 |
| 8=) | Kim Stanley Robinson interview (Nicholls) | 9 |
| 8=) | Brian Stableford: On Lewis Carroll | 9 |
| 13) | Bob Shaw interview (Helen Wake) | 8 |
| 14=) | J.G. Ballard: Glossary of the 20th Century | 7 |
| 14=) | Brian Stableford: On Bob Shaw | 7 |
| 16=) | Wendy Bradley: Book Reviews | 6 |
| 16=) | Greg Egan interview (Byrne & Strahan) | 6 |
| 16=) | Stephen King: On J.K. Potter | 6 |
| 16=) | Nicholas Royle interview (Kenworthy) | 6 |
| 20=) | Chris Gilmore: Book Reviews | 5 |
| 20=) | Interface: Editorial & News | 5 |
| 20=) | S.T. Joshi: On Anne Rice | 5 |
| 20=) | Brian Stableford: On F. Anstey | 5 |

(David Pringle)

Interaction

The following letter column consists of short extracts from comments which accompanied the ballots for the 1993-94 readers' poll:

In general I think the magazine is going well; there are occasionally some bad stories, but there are always good ones and some are very good. I also appreciate the fact that the magazine is prepared to publish risky stories, which not all will like, but the courage to be different must also encompass the courage to be wrong. Medals of honour for being consistently interesting and provocative must go to John Clute and, particularly, to Nick Lowe. Almost invariably, I read "Mutant Popcorn" before anything else. — **Dr Graeme Stewart**, Mexico.

I was a little surprised to discover that there were actually eight stories which I liked, as my over-riding impression of the year's output was of numbing mediocrity. The stories which I note as being my dislikes were the real turkeys, the ones which were either so dull or so impenetrable I couldn't even be bothered to read to the very end of them. Thankfully, I do tend to enjoy the non-fiction items in Interzone. — **Graham Ashley**, Liss, Hants.

Lots of good stuff last year, but the best story was "The Ragthorn." Give it a couple of dozen points from me. I've also enjoyed the extracts in the Gollancz supplement, though I wasn't sure whether these were to be included in the poll. (No, it's essentially an advertising feature — Ed.) Stephen Baxter has knocked Greg Egan off the perch by my reckoning, though Egan's still in strong contention. — **T.J. Mason**, Halifax.

Thankfully you don't often get drawn to horror stories, and those verging on horror are generally unarguably commanding tales that draw the reader along by the scruff of the neck, which is as it should be. I would encourage you to continue with your apparent policy of keeping IZ primarily an sf magazine, with a willingness to become bewitched by powerful writing of any genre. I wouldn't mind not having to read reviews of horror fiction at all. In fact, too many fantasy novels get reviewed too, for my liking... couldn't you keep the reviews focused on sf, so that we know about more sf books than we currently get? Sometimes it seems like only two or three of books against a dozen others, which feels like a wasted opportunity to keep the underdog above the waves. (Point taken, but the large number of horror and fantasy reviews probably reflects

the market reality; nowadays sf does seem to be rarer, and less popular, than these other genres — Ed.) Finally, I really hope you scrap this Gollancz "preview" rubbish right away: a waste of space! — **Syd Foster**, Swansea.

The Gollancz extracts are a good idea I would like to see continued, but not too regularly. Also, what about other publishers? Something I do miss since Million suffered its untimely death are the reviews of genres not native to Interzone. As IZ now "incorporates" Million is there no room to squeeze these in? Even if it were just a page of short reviews on a different genre each month. — **Colin Rice**, Wales.

There is no non-fiction that I dislike to any great extent, although I read IZ primarily for the fiction. I would like to see more fiction featured and would not be concerned if this was at the expense of the non-fiction and internal illustrations (which generally tend not to fit with my mind's-eye visualization of the stories). On the whole I find IZ an excellent magazine and great value for money. You can rest assured of my continued patronage, via my local newsagent (I cannot afford the lump sum for an annual subscription and my wife didn't take the hint at Christmas). — **Andrew J. Fielding**, Keighley.

Generally, when I dislike a story or think it indifferent it is often because the ending is too enigmatic, or a cop-out, or simply leaves me thinking the author him/herself didn't really know how to end the piece, Di Filippo's "Walt and Emily" being an example. (Authors, please take note: this is an all-too-common complaint — Ed.) Otherwise, keep up the good work, and thanks for an excellent magazine. — **Kevin Ball**, Batley, W. Yorks.

1993 was rather a good year. Stephen Baxter contributed a very interesting variety of tales, newish writers such as John Meaney did well, and I was very impressed with Barry Bayley's "The Way Into the Wendy House," so impressed that simply thinking about it makes me want to read it again. (Alas, it placed near the bottom of our popularity poll; perhaps the ending was too "enigmatic" — Ed.) However, the very best thing you did was the Bob Shaw special issue. Five stars for the package! — **David Redd**, Haverfordwest, Wales.

I only notice the artwork in my own stories, and I love and loathe the same guy. Russell Morgan's artwork for "Crush" (IZ 68) was excellent. For "Getting Rid of Teddy" (IZ 76) it was

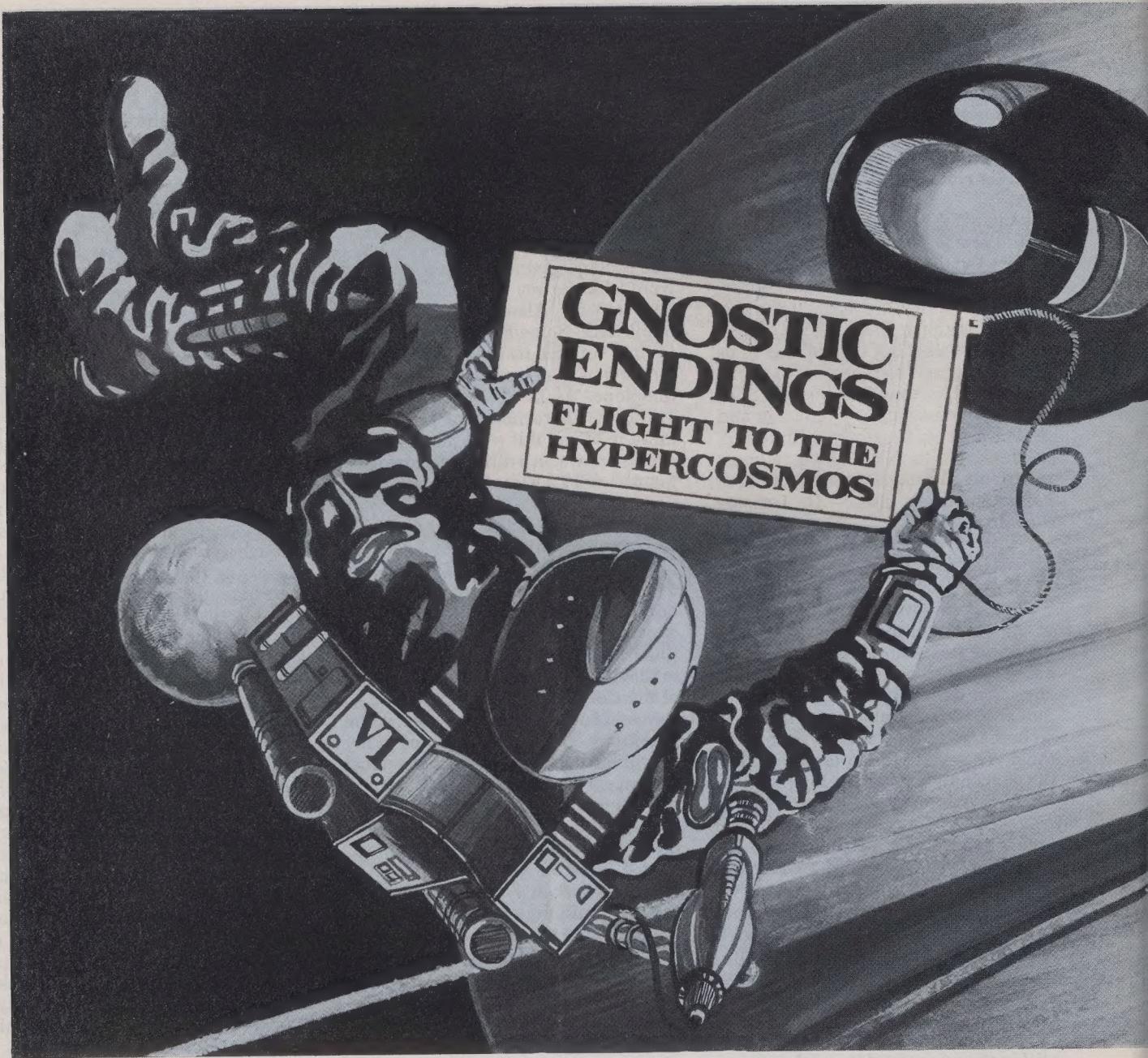
dismal. Why is the mother a collagen-lipped bimbo? Why is the little boy on page 49 a Vulcan? Perhaps Russell is just better at the more "abstract" stuff. — **Ben Jeapes**, Abingdon, Oxon.

My real gripe this year is the magazine's overall look, which is beginning to seem very dated, very staid. Sometime last year I saw the latest copy of Back Brain Recluse, which really grabbed my attention. This is unusual, normally I would not care how the stories are presented if the quality of the text is high; however BBR was so exceptional that it brought into focus a growing dissatisfaction that I have with your otherwise excellent magazine. I had this urge to show BBR to friends and praise it highly, whereas IZ passes through, is read and filed away. I'm not suggesting that you completely adopt their high-gloss approach to presentation, but that you at least review what you are capable of. (We agree that the last issue of BBR was visually impressive; there's one snag, however — they don't seem to have produced an issue since. Obviously, an annual small-press anthology series, which is what BBR seems to have become, can afford the time to achieve things which a monthly magazine finds difficult to do unless it is very rich. That said, we do hope to improve the look of Interzone in the coming year — Ed.) What IZ currently fails to do is transmit the excitement of its content in a visual manner through its pages; and this I feel is not the fault of the artists who work upon each story but more an overall lack of tension in the magazine's visual style. A lack of visual vision! — **David Smith**, Grays, Essex.

I think you could be much more adventurous with the cover art. This is the perfect place to experiment with more surreal or abstract images (like the J.K. Potter cover to issue 77), rather than the rather hackneyed sf/fantasy pictures you usually use. When it comes to the inside of the magazine, though, I tend to take the opposite view. I think Interzone's conservative format is one of its strong points. I don't want the stories detracted from by jazzy layouts and self-indulgently "interesting" pictures. Mind you, I'm one of those die-hard believers in the primacy of the written word who think the fiction shouldn't be illustrated at all. — **Paul Western**, Teddington, Middx.

The illos are getting better, and you are (wisely) not filling up the magazine with inferior illos but letting many of

Continued on page 40



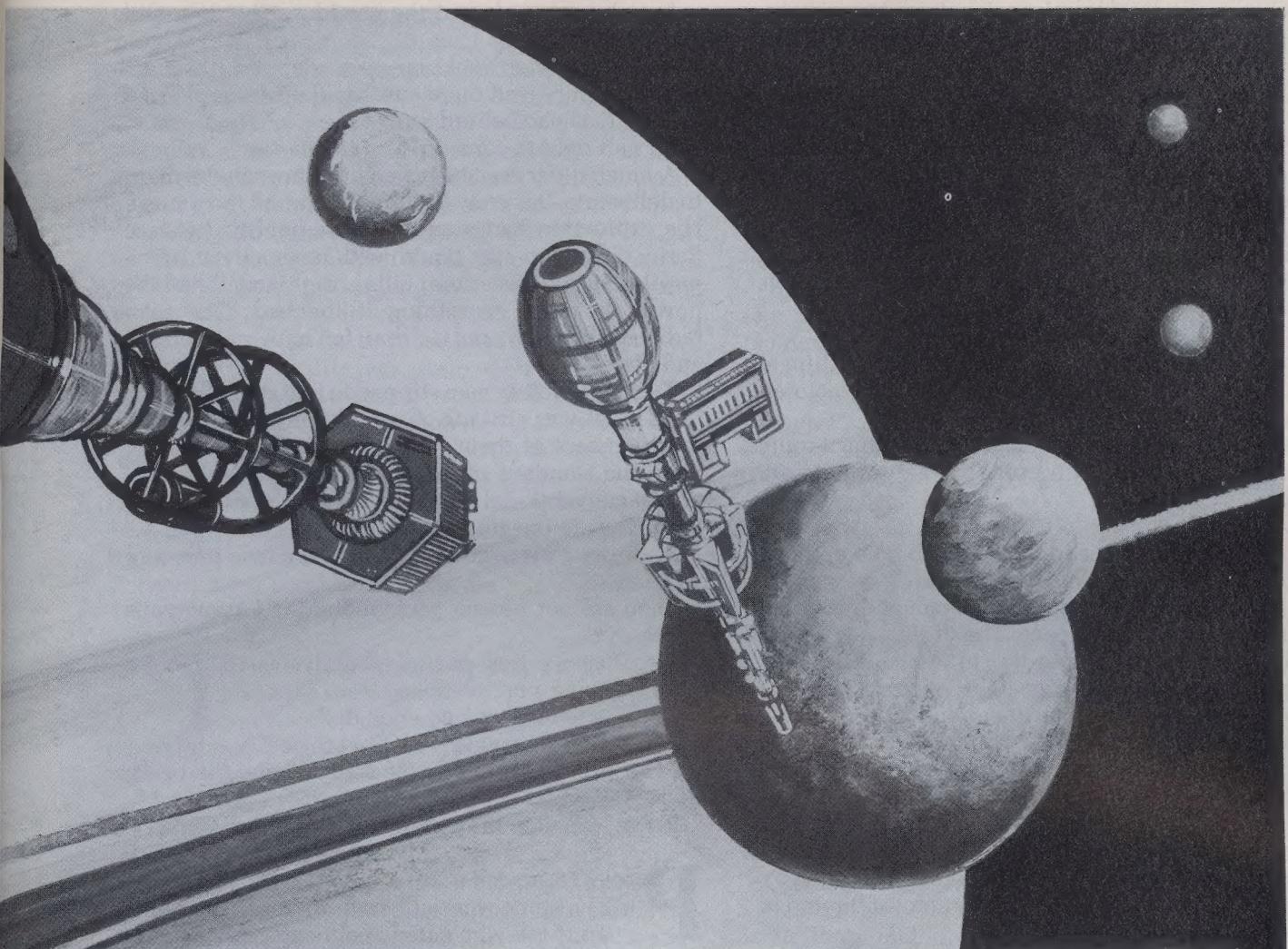
Geirhart had decided to have the encyclopaedia removed from his brain when he returned to Earth. He had begun to hear it as a ghostly alien voice in his head, interfering with his thoughts. It was lucky he had only installed page memory, accessed through a mental directory rather like looking up an entry in a book, and had not opted for staged memory in which encyclopaedic knowledge was incorporated into the personality as though it had been learned. Sooner or later staged memory recipients all developed personality disorders which did not always disappear when the implants were extracted. Even worse were memory governors which managed retrieval pathways so as to make any past experience instantly available, and which were now known to promote extreme psychotic reactions. Like genome engineering, like nuclear power back in the 20th century, memory implanting was yet one more failed technological promise.

Here, beyond the orbit of Saturn, the stars were a pitiless blaze, an intimidating stare. Geirhart had found that an odd thing happened if he looked at

them through his faceplate for any length of time. They seemed to disappear from his consciousness.

Instead, he saw only the darkness between. An unseen coiling serpent, embracing and swallowing the light. He had to close his eyes and shake his head sometimes to make the illusion go away. A tiny slug of living flesh, magnetized boots clumping underfoot, gauntleted hand sliding weightlessly on the guard rail, he made his way along the gantry, flicking his flashlight through the drone racks. He was looking for meteor damage, as one or other of the station's crew of three did every 24 hours. The racks were only half full. The rest of the drones were months late in arriving. Andrews, the station commander, was even talking of starting the launch procedure without waiting for the full complement.

The Jacques Monod space station resembled a crude water pistol. Forward was the launch sleeve, a long barrel pointing into galactic space. Behind that came the drone racks and the service bay, then the living quarters in the form of a rotating armature. Aft was the station's most expensive part, a fat bulb



BARRINGTON J BAYLEY

containing a fusion reactor powerful enough to supply a small country, nearly all of whose tritium was destined to be used up in a short period of time. His task finished, Geirhart turned to face the minute disc of the sun. Carefully he walked back to the armature, where he stepped into the entry port and seized the handgrips. With a surge he was accelerated into the slot. Then he was standing in 0.7 centrifugal gravity, on the inside of the spinning drum. He took off his spacesuit and hung it in the wall cupboard, afterwards signing the checklist.

The corridor brought him to the combined lounge and control room, where he found Andrews and Reeve. Andrews was about Geirhart's age but was lean and spare, lacking Geirhart's admitted tendency to melancholy. Like any deep space commander he carried a gun strapped to his waist at all times, ready to shoot any subordinate who went crazy and endangered the spacecraft.

That meant he would have to shoot either Geirhart or Reeve, the only other members of the crew. Reeve was the odd one out of the three. Andrews and Geir-

hart were on Jacques Monod station because of their deep-space experience, but Reeve had worked and pushed to take part in the operation. A quiet, monkish young man in his early 20s who spent his spare time reading the novels of Balzac, he had an almost religious attitude towards the project. He described it as the second most important event in the history of the cosmos.

The first most important being the evolution of life on Earth.

"Listen to this," Andrews said. He opened a key on the communications board. A ragged hissing noise came through.

"It's a jamming signal."

"Where's it coming from?"

"Not far away. I've placed it on the fast line route from Earth."

"Could that be the supply ship?"

Andrews shrugged. "Why would it come on the fast line route? Starseed can't afford such extravagance. And anyway what in God's name is it jamming?"

Reeve shook his head. He seemed excited. "I think

somebody put the jamming signal on by mistake. Otherwise it makes perfectly good sense to me. Remember, we are way behind schedule and after the job's done Jacques Monod is due to be converted back into an orbital battle station."

That could be it, Geirhart thought. The military could have applied pressure, even supplied fuel for a rapid transit.

In just over an hour Andrews was able to put an optical image on the wall screen. The approaching ship was spraying plasma as it decelerated. Andrews frowned.

"The jamming is deliberate."

The transmission was close enough now for him to be able to pick up the signal it was jamming, vectored in from another direction.

The direction, in fact, of the fuel-economical route which was normally taken, spiralling slowly out from Earth.

In time the visitor slid into view to take up position alongside the Jacques Monod. It was an old interplanetary transport, scarred and battered from its many years in space. The design was a standard one. A central spindle, to which could be attached fuel tanks and cargo pods, separated the rear bulb, containing the power plant and motor, from a hexagonal bolt-like head in which were the living quarters. All but one of the spindle's fixing brackets were unoccupied; the fuel tanks must have been discarded as they emptied en route. Geirhart noted that there was no fuel for a return trip. Probably the transport ship was to be abandoned, its crew returning on the Jacques Monod. It was a space tramp, at the end of its usefulness.

But where were the drones it ought to be bringing? It carried no cargo pods. Geirhart's gaze wandered to the ship's name which was freshly painted on the hexagonal bolt, the only clean-looking detail on the whole assembly.

"It looks as if it's been newly commissioned," he murmured. "The Reverend Jim Jones."

A screech came from the com board, on a different frequency from the jamming signal. A male voice spoke.

"The Reverend Jim Jones to the Jacques Monod. May we come aboard please."

The accent was North American, but the words were in no sense a request. They were a flat statement of intent, and already a passage tube was snaking its way towards the port.

"Hold," Andrews answered uncertainly. "What department are you?"

There was no reply. Andrews' position as station commander had become unenviable. By now all three were able to guess that they were in the middle of an interdepartmental squabble. The roughness with which such rivalries were occasionally settled – interdepartmental warfare was not always a metaphor – made it dangerous to argue or resist, even when the means were available, which in this case they were not.

A bang came from the distance.

"They've forced the lock."

Andrews made a decision. He unbuckled his gun holster and placed the weapon on the table, in sight but out of reach.

Footsteps sounded in the corridor. The door slid open.

A young, alert-looking man stepped through. Briefly he surveyed the scene, his glance sharp. Then he bent his head behind him.

"It's all right to come in, Mr MacMaster."

A much older man followed him through the door. In deliberate, leisurely fashion he studied the lounge. His expression had a smouldering quality, his face florid, the brown eyes liquid, with unusually enlarged pupils. His gaze was compelling, as though it had the power to affect everything it touched. The man radiated authority, and Geirhart felt both mesmerized and afraid.

Two more young men slipped in and stood flanking him. What was striking about all four was the inappropriateness of their apparel for deep space. They wore the standard office wear of the past two centuries: conventional business suits cut in dark cloth. It was easy to imagine oneself back on Earth.

Andrews rose to confront them, his face pale and worried.

"You are not project personnel. May I know your authority?"

MacMaster's lips pursed slightly, as though he were enjoying a private joke.

"Oh, we have authority enough."

"Are you here to take over the project?"

"The project," MacMaster said slowly, "is being aborted."

Reeve leaped to his feet in anger and dismay.

P roject Starseed.

The name was deliberately evocative.

To those who cared about such matters, the modern age was important chiefly because it had answered a question of gigantic proportions: What is the frequency of life in the universe? At one time estimates had been wildly positive. Yet the radio ears listening for the signals from alien civilizations had heard nothing, and the other planets of the solar system had all been found to be biologically dead, even the gas giants whose electrified, chemically rich atmospheres should, according to theory, have produced primitive organisms at least.

The great question might then have remained academic, had it not been for the discovery of the Meerham mass-avoidance effect. Suddenly, any target in the home galaxy was reachable, the Meerham drive neatly side-stepping the normal relativistic limitation as an object approached the velocity of light.

The Meerham drive had one serious drawback. It could not mass-avoid more than just over 98 kilograms, and that had to include the drive itself. Neither could two or more Meerhams share a load: their proximity mutually cancelled the mass-avoidance effect. Nevertheless the exploration of the galaxy went ahead, drive, power, guidance and instrumentation all being packed into 98 kilograms. Thousands of robot drones were despatched in the following decades.

The search was for life. Those drones which returned – about 30 per cent – came back with an increasingly dismal picture. The ubiquitous gas giants were targeted first. All were sterile, a puzzle

to prospective xenobiologists. The search was soon switched to Earthtype planets, and these proved difficult to find. The dynamics of planetary formation did not normally place a planet within a star's ecosphere. Only when a planetary system developed irregularly, interrupted by some accident — as had apparently happened with the Earth — did a world appear at a promising distance from its sun. Eventually nearly a hundred were located, appearing to have all the advantages which Earth enjoyed, and some billions of years old. Many had water oceans and maintained an equable temperature.

But all were as Earth must have been before the miracle of organic life took place upon it. Oxygenless atmospheres. Landscapes of rock and sand. In the shallow seas, as in the atmospheres of the gas giants, organic molecules proliferated. But nowhere did they come together to form a replicating organism.

Slowly and inexorably, it dawned on human consciousness that there was no other beside itself. The appearance of life on Earth was a unique event.

Apart from that, all the galaxies, all of existence, was lifeless.

The Jacques Monod. Yes. An apt name for a station such as this."

Geirhart came back to the present. His encyclopaedia had sidetracked him, drawing him into a reverie.

The intruders' leader, the man called MacMaster, was speaking for the benefit of his underlings. He had taken up position in the centre of the lounge, confident of his command over the station. Did he realize he made a most unlikely space captain? Physically he had gone to seed, with a well-developed paunch, and he moved ponderously. An administrator, no doubt, much out of place here.

"Jacques Monod was a 20th-century biochemist," he went on. "A cool, penetrating thinker, though his reasoning must have been distasteful to most of his contemporaries. Monod found that nothing in the physical world necessitates the arising of life. Further, he argued that Earth's biosphere is of no objective significance — it is simply one out of an infinite number of possible chemical configurations. Its *a priori* probability of occurrence was therefore infinitesimal. Such an event having occurred once, the probability of a second occurrence falls effectively to zero.

"Monod was right, of course. Except in one respect. The spontaneous origin of life in a physical system is not merely infinitesimal, it is absolutely zero. But for the Tragic Event, it would never have happened."

Geirhart had found himself performing a mental duet with MacMaster as he explained Monod. He had automatically found an entry which MacMaster was paraphrasing. MacMaster too had an encyclopaedia.

But what was this "Tragic Event"? That was not in the entry.

And the Reverend Jim Jones? Of whom was the visiting ship a namesake? Geirhart consulted the index, found an entry. It too was a detail in 20th-century history — uncanny how much sprang from that time — and he scanned it briefly, experiencing the familiar "odd" sensation of recalling a memory which he had never laid down.

Its import caused something chill to enter his heart.

One of the young raiders had picked up the gun formerly carried by Andrews, who shook his head when asked if any more weapons were aboard.

"Shall we transfer the staff to the Jim Jones, Mr MacMaster?"

"Shortly. Before we close the project down I would like to inspect the arrangement."

Reeve started shouting. "You can't do this! The project must go ahead! What gives you the right —"

He subsided white-faced on receiving a look from one of MacMaster's men. Geirhart noted anew the manner of the three. MacMaster himself was relaxed, but there was something forced about the state of constant alertness maintained by his subordinates, as though it cost them a great effort. There was, too, a sameness about them, a "cloned" look. Was this the result of agency training? Or one of the eugenics programmes, perhaps?

An insight came to him. There was another explanation.

They belong to a cult.

He spoke up. "If the project is to be wound down, as you say, then we have a right to know why."

MacMaster then did something astonishing. Reaching into an inside jacket pocket, he brought out a flat silvery case and opened it. Eyes downcast as if in thought, he took out a small white cylinder and placed one end between his lips. The other end he set to smouldering by means of a small device he took from another pocket. He breathed in deeply before returning both lighter and case to their places.

Geirhart caught an acrid, slightly aromatic whiff of smoke. He blinked. He had smelled that aroma before, in an illegal club in Toronto. It was tobacco.

The man who had seized the Jacques Monod was revealed as a pervert and a criminal, addicted to one of the most dangerous of forbidden drugs. Tobacco addicts were reputed to be uncontrollable in their craving.

The government department which had despatched him clearly was deeply corrupted. Or was it a government department? A foreign power seemed unlikely. Then what else?

Before his appalled prisoners MacMaster breathed out a cloud of the poisonous fumes. Turning to Geirhart, he spoke in smooth, measured tones.

"Allan Dwight Geirhart, born Burlington, Vermont, father a medical doctor, mother a nurse. Wife murdered by a mob in Kenya. She must have been one of the last white people to set foot in Africa, I imagine." He paused. "Loyalty rating 15, not all that good. Inducted into OutPlanet Service at the late age of 42. Volunteered for Project Starseed. Service confidential assessment: 'Motivated to Starseed by wish to get as far from Earth as possible.'"

Puffing on his cigarette, which he then held elegantly between his fingers, MacMaster turned next to Reeve. "Clifford Reeve, born near Ajo, Arizona. Father and mother both hydroponics engineers — what would once have been called farmers. Majored in philosophy of history, but failed to take final examination. Loyalty rating 35, very bad. File reads: 'Secretly believes survival of humanity more important than survival of American state.' You see, they know all about you, Mr Reeve. You are fortunate to

be a white man living in a liberal society. Elsewhere you would have been handed over to the Elimination Service, instead of being merely sterilized. Exempted from military training on grounds of unreliability, drafted into OutPlanet Service. Immediately volunteered for Project Starseed."

Andrews did not visibly react to this quoting from state documents, but Geirhart felt relieved. It meant MacMaster was after all on official business. MacMaster turned to Andrews, and continued.

"Stewart Bruce Andrews, born Austin, Texas. Father an interceptor pilot, mother an aeronautics engineer. Served 20 years in Aerospace Corps, 12 of them as interceptor pilot, then retired into OutPlanet Service. Loyalty rating the standard eight: obeys all orders of government, does not question or think about policy of government. Appointed commander of *Jacques Monod* on the basis of service record."

Andrews replied to this. "I have not formally handed over command of this station to you. If I am to do so I must have your credentials."

A loud click came from the main panel. The hiss of the jamming signal came through, but over it an audible voice. The sender had realized what was happening, had boosted his transmission and managed to switch on the station's receiver.

"Jovian Conveyor to Jacques Monod. The vessel that has rendezvoused with you is an unauthorized privateer. Repeat, the vessel that has rendezvoused with you is an unauthorized privateer. Do not permit to board."

The words struggled through the noise of the jammer. MacMaster gestured.

"Turn that off."

The man who had first entered went to the board, briefly inspected it, and worked the keys.

Silence descended.

His reassurance vaporizing, Geirhart looked to Andrews. He was a man he had always admired. Dry, practical, cynical, he had no time for Reeve's emotional outlook, and little for Geirhart's tortured conscience.

What would he do now?

There was little he could do. But he stared MacMaster in the eye.

"Who are you?"

MacMaster seemed uninterested in him. He looked instead at Geirhart. "You are right. You should know why the project has to be stopped."

He took a step towards him, holding the cigarette elegantly aside between two fingers. "Open your induction reader."

"No!" shouted Andrews. "Don't let him do it! He'll influence you!"

How had MacMaster known that he had an encyclopaedia? Was it on some document somewhere? No, it was more likely an acute piece of observation. Some people claimed to be able to recognize encyclopaedia recipients – though Geirhart could not – by an occasional distracted air. MacMaster's breath stank of tobacco as he bent his head close, bringing his induction coil near to Geirhart's. Geirhart knew he ought to heed Andrews' warning; but he wanted to know what was happening. Just the same he felt as though it were by MacMaster's will that he opened the port.

Data sang between the two coils. Information

poured into Geirhart's memory and into the encyclopaedia's appendix, the buffer store for news, personal histories, entry updates ready to be filed. Geirhart almost staggered as the truth about MacMaster and what he represented reeled dizzyingly past.

"Let us see if you can digest and understand that," MacMaster said.

The carrier's arrival time is in 28 hours and ten minutes," Walther stated. "They might feel sufficiently worried to decide to bypass us. A course change made now could even give them a chance to evade our missile."

"It doesn't matter much," MacMaster responded. He glanced at Geirhart, seeing him flinch at mention of the word "missile."

The other two station crew members, Andrews and Reeve, had been confined to their quarters for the moment. MacMaster let his luminous gaze pass on to his helpers: earnest young men with unsmiling faces. On the Jim Jones were five more just like them. He congratulated himself that he had trained them well. Their attention-effort rarely flagged. Of course, it was hard work for them. They had not achieved the integration of psychic energies which made higher consciousness a natural state.

That didn't matter now, either.

Walther stood back, appearing to have finished his work at the board.

"Are the locks on?"

"Yes, Mr MacMaster. The launch procedure is completely disabled."

"Good."

MacMaster turned his head. "Now, Mr Geirhart, would you care to show me round your station?"

These people only look as though they're acting professionally. Really they're amateurs."

Reeve spoke in a low voice. There was a guard outside the door.

"That's my impression, too. They're like domesticated suburbanites trying to act like gangsters."

Andrews watched as Reeve sat at the terminal in his quarters. He had logged into the launch system.

"Their locks are designed to deny manager status to anyone, including themselves. That would be the end of things, normally. Their mistake is in treating *Jacques Monod*'s as a newly installed system. It isn't. This was once a battle station, as it is meant to be again. The launch procedure was built on top of already resident firing control, with plenty of redundancy and spread-around to cope with battle damage."

Nodding, Andrews allowed himself to admire the young man. Reeve's failure to matriculate in history didn't mean he was a dunce. He had gone on to gain qualifications in five technical subjects, scorning the memory implants relied on by many.

"Do you mean you can get round their locks?"

"It ought to be possible to get in by the back door, re-awaken the old firing systems and fool the station into thinking it's at war. It would then initiate launch procedure all by itself. The beauty of it is, MacMaster's people wouldn't be able to stop it. Their own locks would keep them out."

"How long will it take you?"

"I can't say for certain whether I can do it at all." Reeve raised his eyebrows. "Sir, we don't know who these people are or why they want to abort the project. They might very well kill us if we thwart them or even try to. That doesn't deter me personally. The project is far more important than my own life. But you... well, you're a career man."

Andrews frowned. "How do you know they're not going to kill us in any case? I'm nearly at the end of my career, as it happens. My children are all grown up, and I haven't much to go home to. And when it comes down to it, I suppose we do have our orders.

"Anyway I don't like being pushed around like this. So get on with it. See if you can get this popgun shooting."

Spermatikoi logoi," MacMaster murmured. "That would be apt. One could see this station as the Terran biosphere's phallus. Each drone is a cosmic sperm cell. Galactic space is a vast womb, each target planet an ovum awaiting fertilization. Yes, it is poetic. But the poetry only veils the true horror of the situation. What do you think, Geirhart?"

Geirhart knew that the Greek expression MacMaster had used referred to the Stoic doctrine of "seed-words," pure information said to descend from higher realms and cause matter to become organized into living forms. When he didn't answer, MacMaster continued, "Put more prosaically, your drones are bullets to the stars."

The two men stood in the servicing bay. Forward were narrow windows — real windows — through which could be seen the half-full drone racks, screening the long tube of the launch sleeve. The hard stars, however, blazed through the lattice.

Geirhart had already shown MacMaster the power plant and the main Meerham. He had offered to take him outside to the gantry which ran alongside the drone racks; MacMaster had declined.

The servicing bay had no centrifugal gravity. When working there the station staff floated most of the time. MacMaster, however, had Earthbound habits. He carefully anchored himself at all times, either to a deck-stirrup or by means of the handrails placed at intervals. Though plainly not a trained engineer, he had displayed some technical grasp, and was letting his gaze rove over the bolted-down test equipment.

"Our main task here," Geirhart explained, "is to harmonize each drone's Meerham generator with the main Meerham which energizes the launch sleeve. If it weren't for that the station could be entirely automatic.

"You are right to call the drones bullets. The Jacques Monod station is really a big gun. It's the big Meerham, acting on the drone's own Meerham field, which provides the acceleration. The drone's own generator does little more than maintain the field.

"Some people ask why we have to use faster-than-light drones at all. After all, the project is on a scale of hundreds of millions of years. A few million years spent in transit wouldn't matter. The answer is probably obvious to you. No guidance system could maintain its integrity for that long, let alone conserve power."

MacMaster nodded curtly, as though insulted by having the point explained.

"And the reason why we are beyond Saturn orbit is that a Meerham works better if it is not too close to the sun," Geirhart added absently. He caught himself. "I'm sorry. You don't have to use an index to know these things."

When accepting the data transfer, he had learned that MacMaster's encyclopaedia used staged memory. Shyly he looked at the other man.

"Does that not cause you any problems?"

Pursing his lips before he spoke, MacMaster said, "I know what you are referring to. You cannot understand such a prodigious mental grasp. You have heard that assimilated memory causes mental breakdown. That is so, in ordinary cases. In order to handle such systems, you must have control over your own consciousness." He emphasized the word. "The common person does not."

"And you? Are you one of the...what do you call them, *subjectives*?"

He instantly felt that he had committed a transgression in asking such a question. MacMaster's presence was intimidating. His lined, rubbery face showed no hint that he had even heard the query. He gestured to the windows.

"What do you feel when you gaze upon the meta-galaxy? The universe, if you want to call it that. A lifeless infinity. What does that thought do to you?"

"It is stunning to think of," Geirhart admitted. "In my belief the shock of that discovery is what has produced the modern political era. It removed the feeling that there is some meaning to life. It enabled governments to act without conscience."

"And have you searched your encyclopaedia for evidence of that thesis?" MacMaster's voice was acid.

"No."

"Of course not. Because you know in your heart that it is a delusion. Rulers have always acted without conscience. Life has always been vicious. What happened in your family, what has happened to billions in our lifetime, is the norm. Only the size of the population is different. There are more people to kill, that is all. And you want to spread this suffering to the stars, and make it eternal."

Geirhart closed his eyes. The story that had poured into his mind through the data port was fantastic, but somehow he was convinced of it. An organization which was thousands of years old, managing to preserve itself in secret, an organization which was itself built around the most profound secret of all. A secret that hid itself as a belief...

Was MacMaster right? Geirhart looked through the windows at the rows of drones again. They represented the high point of technical ingenuity, the Meerham field the acme of subtle physics. The Meerham drive itself was peculiar: when a drone decelerated at the end of its journey, the inertia was "stored up" in the field as latent acceleration. That was how the exploration drones, once having been accelerated by a launch sleeve, were able to return home after having lowered their analytical laboratories into target planets.

The seed drones were simpler: they didn't have to come back, and they carried out no analysis. Their payloads consisted of frozen bacteria, especially

engineered. Dumped into warm oceans, they would begin the task of zipping together the copious amino acids to make proteins. They would multiply and evolve, terraforming the already Earth-type planets.

Purely out of scientific interest, someone would try seeding Jupiter eventually, but at present the gas giants were being bypassed. Current theory held that intelligence could not develop in a purely fluid environment such as a deep atmosphere or an ocean – none had appeared in Earth's seas in three and a half billion years. Life had to climb on to dry land first. And to create intelligent life on faraway planets was the ultimate aim of the project.

It amused Geirhart to imagine the puzzlement of future alien biologists as they tried to figure out the facts of their own evolution. Once they learned to decode chromosomal DNA they would discover how little a part random mutation had played in it. The engineered bacteria contained masses of redundant genes: whole libraries of biological invention drawn from Earth's natural history. These would be found in the chromosomes of every living creature, waiting to be expressed under environmental pressure. The alien biospheres would not be Darwinian, and so they would evolve rapidly: only a few hundred million years, it was estimated, from seed bacteria to intelligent species.

But was all that only the multiplication of tragedy? Geirhart failed to go along fully with Reeve's idealism. Reeve saw the decision to populate the galaxy with life and consciousness as expressive of some noble higher purpose. For his part, Geirhart suspected it was more a blind biological urge. The biosphere had learned that it was alone, and felt threatened. It knew that it might cease to exist, and had conceived the need to propagate. If there were a thousand biospheres, some of those would propagate too, and life would survive for eternity.

Beside him MacMaster was saying, in his melodious murmur, "What intelligent person, when he contemplates the misery and cruelty in the world, has never wished that world not to exist?"

Was this the real reason why he wanted to remove the encyclopaedia?

To have comprehensive knowledge permanently available for mental inspection was not an unmixed blessing. Those endless corridors of facts could be like a bad tooth which one could not leave alone.

The chopping sounds of pangas as they hacked his wife to pieces, always in the background of his imagination, beckoned him constantly into those corridors. It did not surprise him that young Reeve had dropped out from the philosophy of history. Political philosophers had a habit of putting positive aspects on even the worst behaviour.

With its ideological roots firmly in the 20th century, the modern age had evolved forms of government which looked admiringly to the grandeur of Hitler, of Stalin, of Pol Pot, exemplars of their century's great visionary idea: that mankind could be remade into a new, superior type.

The rider to their theorem, namely that the ordinary individual must in the process be valued at zero, had also been taken over wholesale. The people are the

enemy of the state – that was the dictum of probably the world's most powerful man, officially known as the Tiger of Asia (his real name was a state secret, to know it an act of treason), and while other dictators did not borrow his slogan, they had absorbed its meaning. To cow the populace was generally seen as any government's first duty.

Still, Geirhart had to concede MacMaster's observation. The present time was not unique. Even the most extensive system of extermination camps, that of the Tiger and capable of throughputing 50 million units per year, had in reality dealt with no more than ten to 20 percent of the Tiger's subjects in the drive for genetic excellence. That was about standard for the world at large, and on a level with the programmes of Hitler and Stalin. Compared with the imaginative scope of Pol Pot, Stalin's near-contemporary, who had set about eliminating up to half of his country's people using the crudest methods, the modern world acted with restraint.

No, if there was anything new it was in the acceptance of a government's right of life and death over its citizenry. Extermination of populations had become the answer to every problem. True, the "white" states mostly claimed to run their eugenics programmes purely on culling by sterilization, and not to use elimination. Few believed them.

It was odd that genetic engineering was not the preferred path to the improved human being. Gene insertion was far more tricky than had been imagined prior to the mapping of the human genome, but engineered human stock was probably possible if enough resources were put into it. Instead there was only selective breeding and massive eradication of undesirable traits, real or imagined. It was as though leaders did not want the enhancement of humanity to reflect the cleverness of scientists. They wanted it to be a testament to their own power and forcefulness. The evolutionary urge had ended in long queues of the doomed, trudging ten abreast into death factories, useful chemicals tipping out at the other end.

Where genetic engineering had been used, it was also to extinguish the unwanted. Geirhart's wife probably wouldn't have survived long in Africa even if she hadn't been murdered by a mob. The virus that had wiped out Africa's white population could hardly have come about by chance, any more than the similar one which had locked on to the genes for black skin tone and removed negro blood from America and Europe. Interracial trade and travel had ceased since those events. The races went in fear of contact with one another.

MacMaster was still speaking. "All the evil that has taken place on Earth," he said, "is as nothing to the horrors that will be unleashed if your project succeeds."

He has staged memory. A whole encyclopaedia."

"Staged memory," Andrews repeated. "Isn't that the one that sends you crazy?"

"MacMaster says he can handle it."

He was in Reeve's quarters with Reeve and Andrews. All three were confined there for the present. MacMaster had finished his tour of inspection.

"He doesn't seem to think there's anything particularly new in it, in fact," he continued. "The ancient

world had memory systems based on the mind's associative powers. The renaissance magician-philosophers used them as part of consciousness expansion, attempting to embrace all the knowledge of their time in one go."

"What are you saying? What did you learn when he zapped you?"

Geirhart sat down, then stood again and paced as if in mental anguish.

"It's an incredible story. MacMaster belongs to an organization...an institute, a school or society... which according to him has existed for as long as there has been civilization. Only once in history has it come into the open, and then but partially. That was in the second century A.D. I am talking about the schools of the Gnostics."

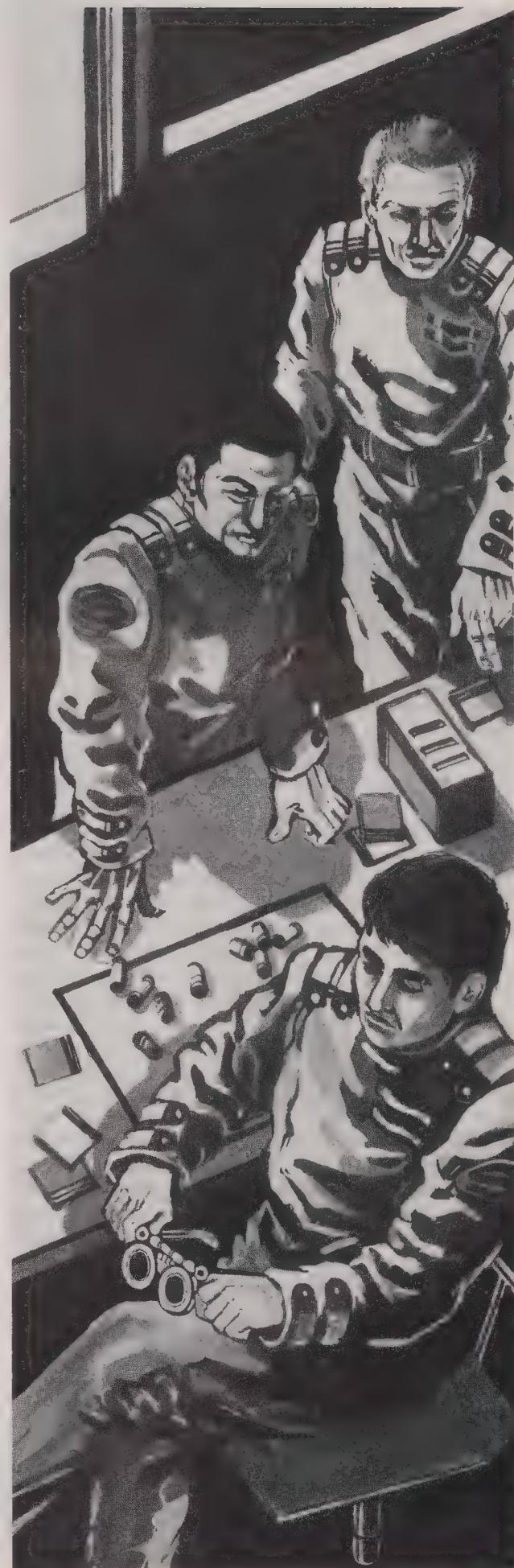
Reeve, who had been staring at the terminal screen, looked over his shoulder. "What, you mean the Christian heretics?"

"That's how they are often represented – a mixture of Christian heresy and Iranian dualism. The view is misleading. Gnosticism wasn't really a religion at all."

As he continued, Geirhart could sense the didactic voice of the encyclopaedia modifying his speech. He had never known if Andrews and Reeve noticed the slight shift in intonation. They did, though, sometimes use him like a book, asking him questions instead of accessing the station's knowledge base.

"MacMaster's organization claims to know, by means of gnosis – that is, by direct perception of higher reality – a stark truth concerning the universe we live in. The metagalaxy did not come into existence by itself: it was created. But not by an omniscient deity. Beyond it there exists a super-universe, or hypercosmos – the Pleroma, in Gnostic terminology – unlike anything we can imagine. The hypercosmos is the source and proper place of belonging of our consciousness. We arrived here as the result of some accident or tragic event and are trapped, exiles and prisoners, in a world foreign to our real nature."

Words from the encyclopaedia, from MacMaster's data, and from his own thoughts, tumbled and tossed in his brain. "The distinguishing features of Gnosticism are depreciation of the cosmos and the idea of a split in the Godhead – the Godhead, that is, of the Pleroma; our cosmos has its own god and ruler. Since gnosis deals with matters beyond normal comprehension, each Gnostic school traditionally expounded its own creation myth. Common to them all is that a being called the Demiurge, an emanation of the hypercosmos and possibly an outcast from it, set about the creation of a universe. For this creation he used matter, his great and brilliant invention according to MacMaster, though there are older myths in which it arose independently and he only organized it into the metagalaxy we see. In either case, the Demiurge is fallible, and his project failed in its purpose. The physical system of spacetime, while awesome, proved unable to generate living, conscious beings. It could only function as a set of physical forces, or machine. This might not have mattered, had not spiritual particles from the Pleroma fallen into the newly created spacetime, or perhaps ventured into it out of playful curiosity. A deadly attraction arose between matter and this divine consciousness. The



two perversely blended, spirit providing the potentiality for evolution which by itself matter lacks. Thus there arose Earth's unique biosphere, a monstrous system whose foundation is pain and fear."

"That's putting it a bit strong, isn't it?" Reeve remarked.

"There's a basic difference between the way we look at life and the way Gnosticism looks at it. We see the physical world as providing the support for mental processes. The Gnostics see it the other way around. Matter is characterized by its arbitrariness – technically, a mixture of randomness and determinism – which acts to limit consciousness, which is non-material, confining and distorting it. It is as though we were forced to spend our lives in a dark prison cell, with only the faintest light coming through a tiny, dirty window. I can quote from a Gnostic text: *This is a world of darkness, utterly full of evil, of falsehood and deceit, a world of turbulence without steadfastness, a world in which good things perish and plans come to naught.*

"This explains why MacMaster and his men are determined to halt Operation Starseed. Infecting other planets with biological systems enlarges the primeval tragedy."

He stopped speaking and suddenly became silent.

Andrews snorted. "What a load of rubbish this is. You say this organization is thousands of years old. Whatever happened to bank interest? Business investment? If they'd been around that long they'd own the solar system by now. Yet look at the ship they came in. It's a piece of junk."

"Commercial institutions represent the Demiurge's oppression of spirit by matter," Geirhart told him. "So do governments and religions. The organization has to stay relatively poor, both because it would become corrupted otherwise, and also in order to remain unnoticed."

Reeve swivelled in his chair. "Frankly I would expect your friends to have a better sense of scale. Aborting our launch will only delay matters for about a microsecond of cosmic time. There'll be another Starseed. What if it's not for ten thousand years? The project has a time span of five hundred million years."

"I suppose they have to do what they can in present time, hoping that future mankind will be better apprised of its predicament. Ultimately the organization strives to release us from our prison and return us to the hypercosmos from which we came. That can never happen if the galaxy becomes colonized, because reincarnation is a fact and when we die our spirit is transferred to another body. With new solar systems being born from cosmic dust all the time, our imprisonment would last the lifetime of the universe. Worse, more light might be drawn down from the Pleroma to inhabit the billions of new biospheres. MacMaster even thinks the Demiurge must be the guiding intelligence behind Starseed; it's an alternative plan to people his dead universe."

He checked himself. There was no point in trying to explain Gnostic mind-transformation, whereby the mind progressively released itself from identity-traps and recognized its astonishing original nature. There was no assurance, anyway, that anyone had ever risen to the hypercosmos, not even those who had attained gnosis.

"We can take comfort from one thing," he said. "Gnostics were pacifists. These people won't do us any harm."

"Hmm, I've been thinking about that," Andrews responded. "They must be waiting for the Jovian Conveyor to arrive – if it does at all, now – so they can dispose of its drones as well as ours. I expect they'll scatter all thousand of them into space. Then they'll wreck the Meerham generator and do whatever else damage they can. They must have planned this jaunt in a hurry, because they didn't bring any fuel for a return trip. That means they intend to use the Jovian Conveyor, or transfer its fuel to their own ship. If the Conveyor doesn't turn up they'll be stranded here alongside us and have to wait for rescue – upon which they'll promptly be arrested and face the death sentence. I can't say I think much of their planning."

"What happens to them personally may not be their priority."

"It usually isn't with fanatics. By the way, their ship seems to have been recommissioned recently. Does its name mean anything to you?"

Geirhart nodded. He had already found an entry, a historical one from the 20th century – why did so much derive from that awful century? "The Reverend Jim Jones was a religious cult leader, Christian, 20th century, United States of America. Jones was a charismatic figure, able to exact total obedience from his followers. He was also aggressive and gun-happy. His followers were drawn from the American poor, a large proportion of them black – there were still blacks in America in those days. To avoid the jurisdiction of the American authorities he led them into the Guyanese jungle, where they set up a colony. But the authorities wouldn't leave them alone. An investigating committee of congressmen flew out, landing at the colony's own airstrip. They were shot dead as soon as they stepped off the plane. Jones then ordered a mass suicide. Vats filled with poison were set up in the central compound, and ladled out to the colonists. The scene was recorded in vision and sound. Those who couldn't bring themselves to carry their own children to the vats handed them to others to do it. Those who wanted to live were shot down as they tried to flee into the jungle. About a thousand men, women and children died that day."

The recording was lodged in Geirhart's brain. He could see the scene in his mind's eye, young children drinking a dark fluid from tin cups. He could hear the quavering, neurotic voice of Jones calling to his people. "Don't be afraid to die. It's good to die."

"I don't understand the connection," he admitted, "unless it's that Jones's group was being persecuted by the government."

"Your friends admire some odd people, for pacifists." Andrews turned to Reeve. "Are you in yet?"

"I've been in for some time. It's just a question of setting it up right."

"What are you doing?" Geirhart asked.

When they told him, he looked both surprised and alarmed. "Are you sure," he stuttered, "you'll be doing the right thing?"

For a moment they stared at him in amazement.

Then Andrews reacted furiously. "I told you not to let MacMaster go through your port! Think straight, man! He's indoctrinated you!"

"But it does make sense. Why the world is so awful. Why every good impulse seemed to end up doing something bad. Take eugenics. Remember the propaganda, earlier in the century? 'We can have a world without disease, without crime, a world in which everyone is intelligent, handsome and fit.' Yet what did it turn into? Extermination of the sick, of anyone thought to bear crime-tending genes, and in the end of anyone who doesn't conform to some crackbrained tyrant's notion of the ideal physical type."

"I strongly suggest," Andrews said dryly, "that you don't go talking like that when we get home. Or if you do, make it clear it's other states you're speaking of, not America."

Geirhart persisted. "Perhaps if we go ahead with this project we'll simply be setting up concentration-camp style societies on another 500 planets, half a billion years from now."

And what of evolution? he thought to himself. No theory had ever really been able to show how life could lift itself by its bootstraps out of elementary matter.

Another scene was coming into his mind. It must have found its way there when MacMaster squirted data through his port; but it was more in the nature of a personal memory. MacMaster was sitting in a room before an audience of perhaps 30 men and women, their faces blank from the effort of willed self-awareness. Geirhart had already seen that forced alertness in the young men on the Jacques Monod. They were not able to relax into enhanced consciousness, as he suspected MacMaster could.

Come, now, MacMaster was saying. Evolutionary theory doesn't work! How is it that a brain which evolved to hunt game on the African savannah can also invent the Meerham drive?

The image faded and was replaced by others, vaguer but with a tantalizing hint of something revealed. He found himself murmuring something.

"Some of the animal forms are faint reflections of images in the Pleroma."

Andrews stepped to him. He placed a hand on his arm. "Listen, I haven't said anything before. Your work has been perfectly adequate. But for some time you've been showing signs of mental disturbance. When we get back to Earth have that encyclopaedia taken out."

Reeve's fingers danced on the keys. "Done it!"

A slight shimmer of vibration could be felt, followed by a nearly inaudible thrum. The big fusion reactor had kicked in. It was sending a tremor through the station's main axis.

Reeve's eyes gleamed in triumph. "They won't be able to stop it now," he said softly.

MacMaster sat in the lounge, smoking from a long white cigarette holder, which had the effect of making his drug habit seem even more sinister. A bottle of claret lay before him on a small table, a filled wine glass beside it. His ruddy face smouldered. It was an expression of controlled rage. Geirhart recalled that one of the claimed qualities of a "subjective" – someone who had integrated his consciousness, and gained a total knowledge of his own mind – was the ability to produce any emotion at will. It was something quite different from the

non-emotion or "detachment" one read about in mystical literature. Instead, it was a mastery over emotions, so that they became instruments of action or even weapons. To face someone with such a faculty was frightening.

Inexplicably, Reeve failed to be intimidated by it. He was gleeful and impudent as he described in detail how he had circumvented Walther's locks. "It will take three quarters of an hour to charge the sleeve up fully," he finished. "Then a launch will take place every ten minutes. Five hundred seed drones." He grinned his delight. "I don't see how you can possibly prevent it. You've effectively locked yourselves out of the management system. As for the back door I went through, I sealed that as I came out. The power plant is inaccessible to anyone, now it's in operation, and the power cables are massively shielded – you couldn't interfere with them in any case. I suppose you might suit up and physically try to stop the drones from being shunted into the breech of the launch tube – the robot guides would simply shoulder you aside. It would be suicidal to go out there with the sleeve energized, anyway."

In leisurely fashion MacMaster drew smoke through the elegant holder, expelling twin plumes from his nostrils. He looked questioningly at Walther. The young man nodded.

"It's as he says, Mr MacMaster."

MacMaster looked to one side. The cast of his face was as though he were packing his anger away. When he spoke, the tones of his voice seemed to swell and fill the room.

"We shall have to bring the whole thing forward."

This made Walther nervous. He glanced at his silent companions.

"That won't allow us to get confirmation, Mr MacMaster."

"It can't be helped. Tell them to bring it in."

What are they talking about, Geirhart asked himself. MacMaster shot him a glance, almost wicked in its enigmatic quality. A couple of minutes later two more young men entered, bearing between them a small, two-handled cask. They placed it in the middle of the floor.

"What's that?" Andrews demanded.

"A thermonuclear explosive. Just a low-yield one we made ourselves. But more than enough to vaporize this station."

Reeve's face fell in sudden understanding and defeat. His shoulders slumped.

"All right," he said, "have a good laugh."

"Mr Reeve, you are a clever young man, and I commend you. It is a pity I have to put you in a losing position. But this is your domain, so it was always possible the three of you could find a way to thwart us."

The tobacco smoke reached him, and Geirhart coughed. MacMaster responded by removing his cigarette from its holder and stubbing it out in the ashtray.

"Allow me to apologize. I did not realize my smoking upset you."

Geirhart scarcely heard him. He was looking at the Reverend Jim Jones on the wide wall screen. "Do we come with you?"

"Oh, you are coming with us. Walther, where is the Jovian Conveyor?"

"It appears they have decided to flyby," Walther answered. "Shall we loose the missile? It might or might not hit."

"It would be kinder. Go ahead."

Walther spoke to someone. They saw the flash of a projectile darting from the Reverend Jim Jones. Reeve, Andrews and Geirhart all exchanged startled glances. Geirhart felt ashamed. What was it he had said? That these people would not do them harm? Why had he said that, when he had earlier heard talk of a missile to take out the approaching transport? Something had convinced him against reason of the benign nature of the invaders. It had come along with MacMaster's data, through his port. He still had to struggle to disbelieve it.

"You don't have any fuel to go home," Reeve said flatly.

"Oh, we are all going home."

MacMaster had drained his glass of claret. It was refilled for him, but for once he disdained to sip it, and instead rose to his feet. He sauntered to the long control board. His assistants were staring mesmerized at one of the board clocks. It was the one which showed Earth time.

As its digits clicked over they closed their eyes, and even the strongest of them shuddered.

"Zero hour, Mr MacMaster."

The dreadful tension they experienced was quite understandable. In conception and deed, the event was the most overwhelming that could be imagined. MacMaster himself would not have been able to bear it, had not men with gnosis, as far above him in consciousness and understanding as he was above the staff of the Jacques Monod, given their consent.

He considered the three who had been usurped as masters of the station. Like the great mass of mankind, they lived in what was termed hypnotic state – they were hylics, in the old terminology – their consciousness totally dominated by the material world, a flickering dreamlike condition. They had no notion of the long discipline necessary for the establishing of true self-consciousness. Without that, they would be unable to grasp the nature of what was happening.

But as sentient beings, carrying a glimmer of the divine light, did they not deserve the dignity of having the situation explained to them? Andrews he dismissed out of hand; he had never for one moment desired self-realization. The young man Reeve was different. The path of his life might one day have led him to the organization; but for the moment he remained hostile. It was Geirhart, who had suffered, who could best penetrate into the mystery.

So it was chiefly for his sake that MacMaster spoke.

"I am going to tell you something," he said, beginning in a low voice. "When he fashioned the meta-galaxy, the Demiurge had intended to create a universe bursting with life and intelligence. The task proved to be beyond his powers. Sterile planets, cratered airless moons, are all that are typical of his handiwork. The tragedy lies in the extent of his preparations. He had constructed the table of elements, from which organic bodies – our bodies – could be formed. This proved to be a trap when a beam of divine light from the Pleroma shone down on to the planet Earth."

MacMaster paused. He became ruminative. His right hand raised itself as if of its own volition, thumb and fingers rubbing together as though at a loss for something. It's the tobacco, Geirhart thought. He is deeply addicted. Are men of higher understanding still subject to physical cravings?

Shrugging, MacMaster went on, "Organic life has no right to exist. It is a travesty of real life. This can be shown from the use it makes of a chain of predation. Organic creatures must devour one another to stay alive! Does that not strike you as grotesque? The one aim of intelligent consciousness should be to extricate itself from this world and return from whence it came. Yet the bars of the Demiurge's prison are strong. Matter has a fatal attraction for the spirit. The divine consciousness seems unable to resist becoming identified with it, once the two come into contact. It is even said that the Pleroma has sent messengers in the past to try to rescue us, and they too became trapped."

"Nevertheless the work to force these bars has gone on, century after century. That which forms the foundation of your personal consciousness has done the same for countless others: people, animals, even the vitality of plants and microbes. With guided evolution it could be freed one day – if the tragedy is restricted to the planet Earth. But what if it spreads to the galaxy, and then to other galaxies? The entrapment then becomes total, and eternal. When our sun swells to engulf the Earth, still your spirit will be flitting from planet to planet."

MacMaster paused again, looking over his shoulder to where Walther was doing something with the wallscreen. How he enjoys making speeches, Geirhart told himself. The Reverend Jim Jones was gone from the screen. There was a view from the station's rear. Masses of stars, the small dazzling sun, the planets picked out with indicator rings, bright Saturn and Jupiter, Earth with its bluish tinge. MacMaster's young men were staring, with a kind of dread fascination, at Earth.

He turned back. "The prospect," he mused, "is one of eternal suffering, driven by the relentless cycle of biological reproduction."

MacMaster stopped, pursing his lips, knowing he had the spellbound attention of his audience. He reached into his jacket for his silver case, his apology forgotten or disregarded. He lit one of the narcotic tubes and breathed in, not bothering with the cigarette holder.

"Do you know when the first fission bomb was exploded? Of course you do. Nineteen forty-five. Less well known is that a low-probability risk attended its detonation. The fear had been expressed that such a high temperature, never experienced on the surface of the Earth before, might initiate the burning of atmospheric nitrogen. Calculating that there was only a tiny hazard of setting fire to the atmosphere, the physicists in charge of the project went ahead with the test.

"What if they had been wrong? The universe's only biosphere would have been incinerated, in the space of about a day – that being the time it would have taken the reaction to spread over the globe. What of the spirit entangled in that biosphere? It would have been suddenly free, without organic bodies to move into. Free to return to the Pleroma."

"That doesn't make sense," Reeve interrupted.

"There weren't any to begin with, four billion years ago."

"You are sharp, as usual. Four billion years ago the divine light was innocent, and in our terms, unconditioned. It has now undergone four billion years of torment, during which it has acquired individuation and human intelligence. Most of it, in fact, now resides in human bodies, with relatively little in animal, insect and plant form. Further than that, people of higher mental attainment, aware of the true situation, are in the human population. The prediction is that if the biosphere were to be destroyed the nightmare would be over."

At the board, Walther spoke. "Our projectile is not going to make contact, Mr MacMaster."

"Sad for them. As for the others."

After this puzzling remark, MacMaster was silent for a while. When he spoke again it was in a low voice. He had an actor's sense of drama, measuring the weight of his words.

"I am able to tell you that physicists in our organization have perfected the atmospheric igniter. Detonation was scheduled to take place a few minutes ago. In three hours time – the time it takes light to reach us from Earth – we would see our planet brighten as its atmosphere burns and kills off the biosphere. That is only the first consequence of the operation. The heat generated is sufficient to boil off the oceans and bake carbon dioxide from sedimentary rock. Earth then becomes a heat trap, the temperature continuing to rise as yet more carbon dioxide is transferred into the atmosphere. The geo-climate should stabilize at 700 degrees, with a dense atmosphere consisting mainly of carbon dioxide and nitric acid. A second Venus, in fact, what Earth would have been had the biosphere not provided a temperature regulator.

"I realize that this news must be unbelievably shocking to you. Your perception is within the material realm. It is different for those with gnosis. They do not see what you see. They see the spirit's flight to the hypercosmos."

Geirhart became dizzy. So that was the meaning of the missile launched at the Jovian Conveyor. It was an act of mercy. Ships and stations in space, as well as the scientific bases on the moon, Mars and the Jovian satellites, would suffer lingering deaths as their supplies ran out.

Andrews and Reeve did not seem to grasp what they had just heard. They were staring at MacMaster with faint smiles on their faces. Reeve uttered a short, mirthless laugh.

"You're like some cardboard villain," he said to MacMaster. "You can't resist explaining everything before you kill the hero."

Some hint of the smouldering hatred Geirhart thought he had seen earlier seemed to return to MacMaster's features. "If nothing else, you have already understood the remainder of my explanation. Thanks to your interference we cannot now wait to get confirmation. This station must be destroyed in the next half hour. We may as well go with it. There is no point in any other course."

Geirhart became aware that MacMaster was gazing at him. He returned the gaze. MacMaster's liquid eyes

became an open portal through which poured an answer to his thoughts.

Yes, I have total control over my personal awareness. My consciousness is higher than yours. You and your companions live in darkness and delusion.

He closed his eyes. Darkness. There was darkness between the stars. So this was why his attention had been drawn to it. Darkness. Dark matter was what chiefly made up the universe. Only a small percentage had been made to shine. And only pinpricks of planets in all that stupendous mass had been prepared as intended abodes of life.

According to one gnosis planetary life had originally been scheduled as but the second order of intelligence. The Demiurge had meant his creation to rival the hypercosmos in splendour. The stars were to have emanated auroras of nebulous angelic beings, veritable gods. That, too, had not transpired. The swirling galaxies were aborted residues. Most of their mass was dark matter, sub-suns which had failed to ignite. Dead relics of a divine mistake, revolving in empty grandeur.

He sagged. Quite without his volition horrid images, images of predation, were precessing before his inner vision. Chimpanzees tearing a screaming monkey to pieces in a rain forest, a merlin staring with cold eyes as it swallowed a wriggling mouse, shrews devouring a still-living frog muscle by muscle and nerve by nerve, leopard cubs tormenting a sprinkbok fawn given them by their mother, wolves cutting out prey from a herd of fleeing arctic reindeer, spiders spinning webs or lurking in holes in the ground. Each was an example of the Demiurge's mad machine in action. Just as was every misfortune ever to befall a sentient being. Children trapped in sinking ships, plummeting down abandoned wells, burning alive in house fires, starved or beaten to death by those entrusted with their care. As was deliberate cruelty. Torture, flaying, delight in domination, pleasure in the gruesome deaths of others. The inner picture show climaxed with an appalling snuff video he had once seen. A young boy, bound hand and foot, bayed in terror and despair as he was swallowed by a giant python, feet first. Modern America's legal intricacies meant that such videos, while illegal, carried government certificates attesting whether they were simulated or genuine. This one had been genuine.

Andrews was shouting. "Pull yourself together, Allan! Don't be taken in by this rubbish!"

"Don't you understand what's happened?"

The other snorted. "For heaven's sake. Their atmospheric igniter hasn't worked! If it exists at all! Earth's atmosphere can't support a self-propagating oxygen-nitrogen reaction. The activation energy is too high."

"They have scientists," Geirhart mumbled.

"Sure. All tenth-rate and mad as hatters. These people are religious lunatics. Can't you see that?" Andrews looked around him and issued a challenge. "Come on! Tell me how this gadget of yours is supposed to overcome the laws of physics."

MacMaster remained silent. Walther replied instead, in a mild voice. To Geirhart he was like a confident young college boy with his life ahead of him, casually explaining something.

"The device is thermonuclear, of large yield,

propagating a star-shaped shock wave. Between the arms of the star activation energy is attained, ensuring that the burning process continues indefinitely. Our people are certain of the outcome."

"Oh, and did they test it first? How would they do that, I wonder? It hasn't worked. Wait three hours and see. But no, you're going to vaporize this station and kill us all, pretending to yourselves that you are transforming mankind. When all you're really doing is killing as many people as are caught in the fireball of your failed lunatic nitrogen burner." He stabbed a finger at MacMaster. "Why do you believe him? Can't you see he's insane. He has staged memory, for God's sake!"

"That doesn't mean he's insane," Geirhart said. "Not necessarily."

"Of course he is." Andrews threw up his hands in disgust. "It's Jim Jones and his colony all over again — why do you think they named their ship after him?"

"It's a matter of consciousness. Of perception."

Planetary conflagration. Geirhart imagined a world burning and melting. He recalled the Stoic doctrine that the world periodically dissolves in fire. But this was one little planet, and it was happening once and for all. It's happening now. Every living being was in death agony. An infernal vision, a cacophony of cries and screams. At the same time it was a huge purging, a vast catharsis. Three billion years of suffering was being burned out.

The encyclopaedia in his brain opened up and poured forth every known atrocity like a flood of filth.

He closed his eyes again.

Ending A

When he opened them it was on a scene of violent confusion. Reeve had chosen that moment to make his move, thinking perhaps that the cultists were distracted. Andrews was only a heartbeat behind him, lunging straight at MacMaster while Reeve went for Walther, attempting to wrest his gun from him.

It was a brave but foredoomed effort. There were three other organization men in the room, and the Service officers were quickly overcome. The young gnostics proved unexpectedly muscular, and for the first time there was something openly thuggish in the way they manhandled the prisoners back into their chairs. MacMaster stood unruffled. Andrews had not even reached him.

Reeve grinned crookedly. "Can't blame us for trying."

"But no one is to blame for anything," MacMaster told him. "That is the whole point."

"You are mad."

Where did these quiet young men get their discipline? There were slim handguns pressed against the temples of Andrews and Reeve. They were pocketed when the two of them relaxed. Geirhart realized he was close to fainting. He was fighting off a darkness which threatened to engulf the lounge. MacMaster had turned to him. Stern compassion was in his face.

"You are distressed, my friend. I will help you."

He reached inside his jacket, and produced something which the suit he wore had evidently been cleverly tailored to conceal. It was a Staeger. Unlike

the small sidearms carried by the others, its large handgrip and bulky emitter block, which threw a fearsome energy beam three by one centimetres in cross-section, gave it an aura of brute strength. The gun was famous as a favoured weapon of gangsters, and Geirhart stared at it in dread fascination.

Words stuttered from his lips. "You are wrong, as well as everyone else," he told MacMaster. "There is no hypercosmos. There is no good god who has tried to help us. There is only evil, and dark matter."

With no change of expression, MacMaster said, "You will thank me, when we meet again in the Pleroma."

Geirhart never saw the red beam which destroyed his brain.

Ending B

A loud clattering noise came from the com board, followed by a strident male voice which rang through the lounge.

"Sit or stand as you are, and make no move. You are so directed by the Department of Corrective Procedure. Failure to comply renders you liable to termination now."

Even through their self-control surprise and consternation showed on the faces of the four young cultists. They looked to MacMaster for guidance. He, like Andrews and Reeve, was scrutinizing the view-screen. There was activity outside. Space-armoured men were swarming over the Reverend Jim Jones. Others were jetting to the Jacques Monod on sturdy-looking ride sleds. There was distant clumping sounds as the troopers hit the hull.

But where had they come from? Beyond the Reverend Jim Jones was nothing but the stars. Then those within the station saw it. A large patch of stars shifted position slightly, as though space had warped. As the stars moved, the ovoid outline of the attacking vessel could just be made out.

It was a mirror-cruiser, its ellipsoidal hull perfectly reflective, but dissipating any close-range image. Undetectable by any ranging device commonly in use, it was virtually invisible against a background of stars, betraying its presence only when it manoeuvred, and then only to a keen observer. Unseen, it must have pursued the gnostics all the way from Earth.

"Detonate now," MacMaster ordered softly.

From somewhere in the armature came the sound of men running in heavy boots. Reeve leaped from his chair to throw himself over the casket which lay on the floor. Andrews rose and tried to block the young cultists who came to pull him off. Nearly tripping over the supine body of Geirhart, MacMaster pulled out his Staeger and tried to aim it, frustrated by the confused tussle.

Then the door flew open. Half a dozen DCP combat troops burst in, seeming to fill the lounge. They were swift and efficient. It was but moments before the gnostics were disarmed and lined up against the far wall. Reeve climbed slowly to his feet, standing beside his commander and facing their rescuers.

The troops had removed their helmets before entering the lounge. Inside their sky-blue vacuum armour

they wore standard uniform garb of the same hue. It was awe-inspiring to see them: the Department of Corrective Procedure was the most feared state agency in the western world. Its responsibilities were widespread. The DCP it was which ran the political internment camps and the eugenics programmes, assembling case files on the genetic and psychological profile of every citizen. Its personnel, needless to say, were all fanatics for the American cause, each with a loyalty rating of One-A. And it was empowered to project force anywhere within technical reach, on Earth or off it. The Outplanet officers stared fascinated at the beamers slotted into the vambraces of the space armour.

"See to it, lieutenant."

The man who had spoken bore the stars of a major. He was blue-eyed, genial-looking, with a broad, ruddy face. The lieutenant knelt to the casket, flipped a panel, inspected the readplate.

"It's safe, sir. Hasn't been set yet."

"Okay, we'll take it as evidence. Get it and these kooks onto the ship. We're on a fast trajectory back."

"Yes sir."

At the same time a paramedic, red cross on his breastplate, examined Geirhart. "No medical treatment indicated, sir."

"Okay."

Andrews found his voice. "I am Captain Andrews, the station commander. This is First Officer Reeve. Welcome aboard, Major. And allow me to say how glad we are to see you."

"Major Wells at your service. Apologies for not getting here sooner." He grinned and inclined his head at the casket. "I believe we may be just in time!"

The cultists were being herded away. Before MacMaster went through the door he paused. He turned. Unlike his younger underlings, he seemed uncrushed by defeat. His eyes fell on Andrews. His gruff, mellifluous voice came softly across the lounge.

"It is still not too late. You may choose to abort the launch."

Then he was gone, with shuffling step, leaving Reeve to importune his rescuers anxiously.

"Major, I assume you know who these people are and why they came here. But they also claim to have released a weapon which has destroyed life on Earth. We don't think such a device would work...but do you know anything about it?"

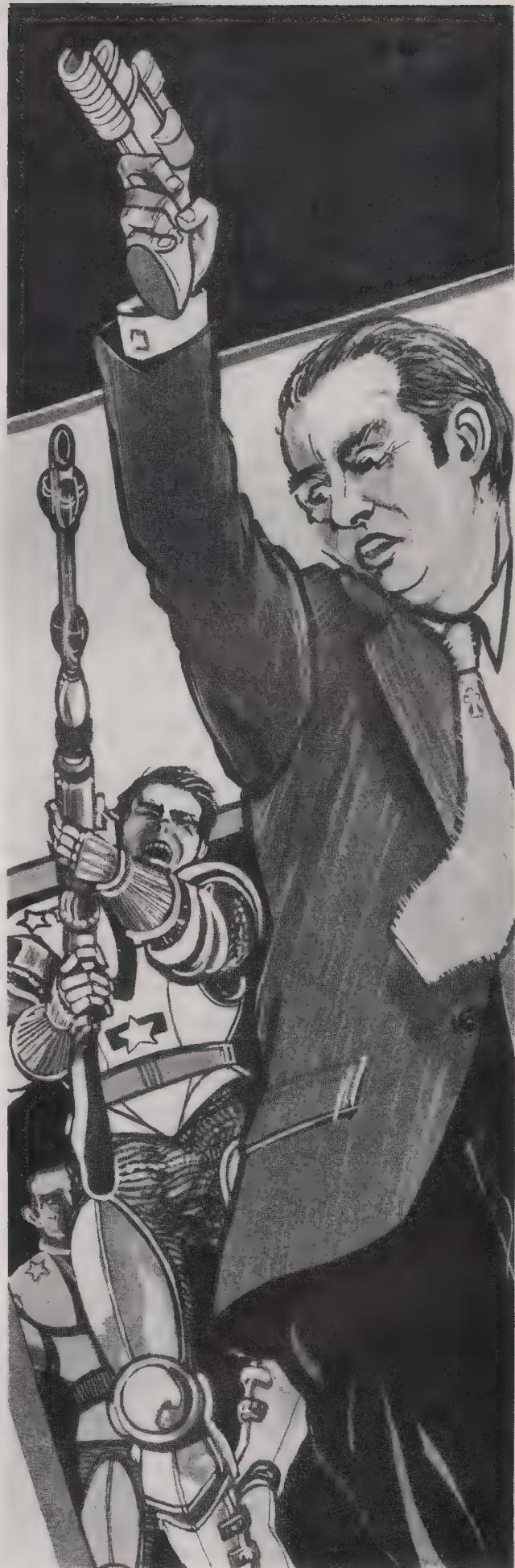
The major chuckled. "Don't worry, their contraption was located – and disarmed – in good time. But a biospheric annihilator it was not, as I guess you've worked out for yourselves. The design concept, you could say, was fundamentally flawed."

He smiled, broadly but seriously. "Still, if it had gone off it would have killed between two and three million genetically correct Americans. It's a lesson to us all, gentlemen, on how much we need political vigilance."

"Well, I guess your project can go ahead as planned now."

"Yes," Andrews replied, slowly and thoughtfully. "It can go ahead as planned."

He could not help but contrast the breezy professionalism of his country's military with the fumbling efforts of the gangster gnostics. Major Wells's well-balanced cordiality was light-years removed from



the sinister bonhomie of MacMaster. The spell which the cult leader had cast, even on Andrews despite his effort to remain unaffected, was evaporating.

"Great guns," Major Wells was saying. "I'll be back shortly to debrief you. Now I'm going to see these traitors put in the brig."

He followed the fusion bomb as it was carried out. It was only then that Andrews knelt beside the form of Allan Geirhart.

Ending C

Whimpering slightly as if in his sleep, Geirhart picked himself up from the lounge floor, assisted by Andrews who guided him to a chair.

"Take it easy. You'll be all right in a minute."

Once he had seemed to recover Reeve spoke to him excitedly. "Everything's back to square one. Something happened. We've been rescued."

He started explaining. Geirhart listened for a while. Then he sighed, waved his hands and interrupted.

"That's enough. Don't tell me any more. Something has happened. But you don't realize yet what it is."

"Well, what did happen, Allan?"

He searched their faces. "We're dead. That's what happened. They detonated the fusion bomb. The station has been vaporized."

They relaxed, smiling. "You're a little confused, Allan."

"Think. Don't you remember? MacMaster shot me dead."

"No, he didn't shoot you. He only waved his Staeger around during the fracas. I doubt if he could shoot anybody, face to face. You fainted, that's all."

"He aimed the muzzle of the emitter block straight between my eyes and pressed the stud. I remember it very clearly."

"You only imagine you do."

"Think," he repeated. "We're here in the station. But the bomb isn't here. MacMaster and his men aren't here. Why? Because none of this is real: We are disembodied spirits, which are projecting the illusion that we are still on the station."

He looked around him, as if trying to test what he was saying. "There's a reason for this. It proves something. By now we would normally have entered new bodies and begun a new life. But we can't, because there are no new bodies to go to. The atmospheric igniter worked. So as spirits we are disoriented. Our minds have responded by making a mental mock-up of the last thing we were familiar with. It will only last a short while. Very soon now the ascent to the Pleroma will begin."

They stepped back, regarding him with compassion. Gently Andrews said, "Let me straighten things out for you. MacMaster and his henchmen have been transferred to the DCP ship. The bomb has been taken there too. The ranking officer, Major Wells, will be coming back to take statements from each of us."

"There's no DCP ship." Geirhart rose and crossed to the board, indicating the wide viewscreen with his outstretched hand. The spindly shape of the Reverend Jim Jones hung alone in space. In demonstration he rotated the camera angle through the circumference of the station. Only stars showed,

until the battered space transport hove into view again.

"See?"

"You can't see it. It's a mirror-cruiser."

"A what?"

"A spaceship with a mirror hull," Reeve supplied. "When you look at it all you see is reflected stars."

Geirhart smiled patiently. "There's no such thing. Your minds are improvising as they go along. Do you see? They are good at supplying reasons, but not at visually mocking-up anything that wasn't there when you died. That's why there's no DCP ship."

"Mirror-cruisers are new. Only recently in service."

"Why don't I know about them? I get all the news you do. My encyclopaedia is regularly updated." Geirhart sighed. "I know this is difficult for you to accept. An event such as the destruction of the biosphere is bound to provoke fugue states, in which the event itself is denied."

"Earth is safe," Andrews insisted. "The atmosphere igniter was never even detonated – the DCP found it in time. One of MacMaster's people came to his senses and led them to it."

Reeve looked askance. "Major Wells didn't say that."

"I thought he did. You probably didn't notice." Andrews continued speaking to Geirhart. "Look at it like this. Clifford and I are both telling you the same story. We can confirm one another. Whereas you were unconscious the whole time. Isn't it more logical that you are deluded? Or mistaken?"

"No. I just told you, your minds are improvising, and they are not even doing it convincingly. Come on, all this stuff about the cavalry arriving in the nick of time! In an invisible spaceship! Doesn't that strike you as just a bit suspect?"

He returned to his seat, and sat rubbing his hands on his knees. "Besides, I know the truth. When MacMaster killed me, I had a vision."

He stopped. He would not be able to persuade them. Neither would he be able adequately to describe what he had seen. How could he explain that he had cognized the real nature of the physical world?

The Demiurge's achievement in constructing matter was of course sublime, in intellectual terms; his intelligence was near-infinite. As for the true reason why the project had gone wrong, that was lost in the loftiness of the hypercosmos. No merely human consciousness, however elevated, could be expected to comprehend it.

The important thing was to bring the disastrous experiment to an end, something which the Demiurge himself seemed unable, or perhaps simply unwilling, to do. When all was said and done the material universe was but a shadow. Above it extended the splendour, the glory, of the hypercosmos. Geirhart had glimpsed that splendour. He knew now what the Gnostics meant when they spoke of the luminous world, a world of light in which there was no darkness. It had been revealed to him what would happen, when the long exile ended. Every bad event, every ill deed, every injury done to the sparks of spiritual light since they had ventured or fallen from the Pleroma, would, in some transcendental manner, be re-enacted and redeemed, in a phase of healing.

"After you fainted MacMaster put his head close

to yours," Andrews remarked. "He pretended to be concerned for you. Probably he was zapping you through your port again. Giving you dreams."

Geirhart placed his head in his hands and let his gaze fix on the floor. "Just wait a little while. You will see. Shortly we shall ascend to the Pleroma."

No one said anything.

Ending D

Andrews' mouth twisted wryly. "Well what do think, Clifford? Could there be something to what MacMaster said? After all, the world's a pretty bad place. Could it be we are simply enlarging an incurable tragedy?"

The paramedic had just taken Geirhart away. Reeve shook his head. He was emphatic. "I believe we were created to solve problems, not to run away from them. If there were such a thing as this 'Demiurge' I'd probably be on his side. That's why he gave us intelligence."

Andrews was gazing through the viewscreen, where the Reverend Jim Jones was being examined from nose to ventura. They didn't know yet whether it would be taken back to Earth, or set adrift in space. "Yes, but if I think about it, I've got through life mainly by not thinking. There's too much that's awful."

"I know what you mean. All I can say is, nature is profligate. She makes millions of something just so one will turn out right. We're doing the same. Maybe we will be creating 500 or a thousand worlds no better than ours, or even worse. But one of them might turn out right. It's our duty to give that a chance to happen."

"One thing you can be sure of," he went on. "If there's ever to be a paradise it has to be right here, in the metagalaxy, not off in some heaven. The material universe is all there is."

"I have to agree there, I suppose." Andrews paused. "I hope Allan recovers once they get that damned database out of his head."

They watched the sled carrying Geirhart dwindle and disappear into the mirror-cruiser. An urgent thrumming suddenly seized the station. The first of the Meerham seed projectiles was being shot to the stars.

Barrington J. Bayley, born 1937, is Britain's great under-sung pulp philosopher. His previous stories for us are "The Ur-Plant" (IZ #4), "Escapist Literature" (#13), "Tommy Atkins" (#27), "The Death of Arlett" (#32), "Culture Shock" (#35), "Why Live? Dream!" (#59), "Quiddity Wars" (#62), "Teatray in the Sky" (#64) and "The Way Into the Wendy House" (#71). It's time some enterprising publisher reissued them all as a collection.

Gather Yourselves Together

A previously unpublished novel by

Philip K. Dick

By 1952, a young Philip K. Dick had been successful with numerous sf short stories and decided to try a serious, mainstream novel. Set in 1949 amongst the evacuation of American businesses from mainland China, *Gather Yourselves Together* is a steamy, claustrophobic tale of two men and a woman isolated by circumstances and alienated from each other by their pasts – or lack thereof. Middle-aged Verne Tildon and half-his-age Barbara Mahler are forced to put aside the lingering resentments and frustrations of a Stateside love affair in order to do the job they've been assigned, preparing a factory compound for transfer to the approaching Communists. Carl Fitter is the unsuspecting young man who finds himself embroiled in their tensions, and around whose sexual awakening with Barbara the novel is structured. Never before published, this early novel reveals Philip K. Dick's obvious talent and skill in a manner quite unlike any other book he was ever to produce.

Published in the USA by WCS Books in a limited-edition, single press run of 1,200 copies. Full-cloth hardcover, acid-free paper, full-colour dustjacket. Designed, typeset, and with cover art by James "Kibo" Parry. Publication date: June 1994.

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Human Waste

Mary Gentle

My child is a pet substitute. I designed it to be male, to get my own back on men in general. I see nothing wrong in this. My therapist advised me to get rid of my aggression.

The sun is slanting through the window, striping the polished floorboards. The room smells of beeswax. Little Thomas is pulling at my hip with chocolate-covered hands. He stinks of ammonia. I haven't changed him for days.

"Mummy? Mummy? Mummy? Mummy?"

He hits the same pitch every time. Exactly the same questioning whine. I didn't have to alter the basic design specification for this, it seems to come to all of them with their DNA.

"Mummy? Mummy?..."

The creases of my black denim jeans at my hip are marked with melted chocolate. I hate that. I hate it so much.

"Muh---"

As I have done so many times before, but with no less satisfaction, I lift Thomas by his little romper-suit collar, pivot in the swivel chair, draw my foot back, and kick.

It is satisfactorily solid, like kicking a warm sandbag. Even painful, given how solid a two-year-old is. Nothing else, however, gives the right trajectory, the right thump! on landing.

"Whaaaaaaaaaa---"

The small body impacts with the floor on the far side of the room. I can see at a glance that he has broken his neck, and that the downy hair on his skull is matted with blood where he has fractured the fragile bone plates. I lean my elbow on the desk and watch.

Nanoscopic structures scurry across the body of my baby.

They ooze from his pores, micro-machines crafted so small that their gears are atom-sized, their manipulators capable of juggling basic matter. Nature gave us the prototype of such machines a milliard ago: the organic cell. My nanoscopic devices are merely non-organic improvements.

The grey goo flows, tide-like, as if a time-elapsed mould were growing on the little corpse. In 30 seconds it flows back, vanishing into his bone-cavities that are designed specifically for nano-constructors.

Little Thomas, stiff-armed and stiff-legged, pushes himself up onto his feet and patters back across the floorboards.

"A'gen!" he demands. Breathy. "'Gen! Do it 'gen!" I didn't say I designed him to be bright.

He pulls at my thigh. This time the kick is a reflex, the anger something bright and sharded and brilliant to go with. So far as I'm concerned, the pain he gave me getting out of my birth canal entitles me to anything I do.

Whomph!

"Whaaaaaa---"

Thud.

Patter, patter, patter.

"'Gen! 'Gen! 'Gen!"

The day he starts getting intelligent is the day I'll reprogramme him. I shouldn't have to. The nano-repairers in his body are extremely specialized – part of one of the medical projects for which I've earned such astonishingly large amounts of money. One of their design-tasks is to continually maintain a constant state of body and brain from day to day. Thomas is chronologically six now, but biologically he is still two.

I'll keep him this way. He might grow up to be one of those youths outside the apartment in loose shirts and trousers whose bones, ramshackle-tall, always seem on the verge of folding up like a deckchair. At 14 he could be physically stronger than I am.

He doesn't have much of a memory, either. I haven't quite worked out whether that's part of my design specs, or whether Nature (that outmoded concept whom I flatter myself I somewhat resemble) is being kind. Don't count on it. Nature doesn't care much about individuals. She's not that kind to species, and I have a suspicion the entire biosphere could flip over to a white-state ice planet and She wouldn't be much bothered. As I always tell my students in web tutorials, don't care if you fuck about with Gaia. She doesn't care about you.

My co-workers John and Martin are invaluable in web tutorials. When I say *invaluable*, of course, I mean capable of being exactly valued. I am still paid one third less than they are.

A warm and breathing little body, wet about the crotch, is trying to climb onto my lap.

Whomph!

"Whaaaaaa---"

Thud.

Patter, patter, patter.

"'Gen! 'Gen! 'Gen!"

Thomas does look like Thomas – his father, I mean. Actually I have nothing against Thomas Erpingham, as such; he is not one of the men I imagine when I break Little Thomas's arms. It's a pity the child has his blue eyes, and his black hair. I would quite have liked it if it had taken after me. I suppose I should have paid more attention to that side of the DNA-twiddling.

I left my various machines talking to the web and went to have a shower. Sometimes I take Little Thomas into the bath and play with him. Sometimes I even drown him.

Today I wanted to be on my own, and locked the bathroom door, from time to time turning down the jets so that I could hear the child screaming for food and water. The nanotech makes sure he doesn't die – the micro-machines photosynthesize for him – but water can be a problem. Dehydration makes him listless. Still, to look on the bright side, I have got good laughs over the web when I remark that I forgot to water the baby.

The shower bounced jets off my freckled skin, warmed, scented and dried me. I don't look at my hands too often these days, although it is a remarkably difficult thing to avoid one's own hands. The scars are gone, nanotech repairers of my own make certain of that. They have, however, the same familiar shape they have always had. Stubby, with strong nails. All they lack is the coarse black hairs.

Familiar, of course, meaning: pertaining to the family. Yes, they are my father's hands. I could alter them. I prefer not to.

"Mummy! I want to watch a vid-yo."

I padded across the floor and flipped the wall-screen to the rolling news channel. There is a small war going on somewhere in the south; they imprison the women in camps and rape them, force them to have the soldiers' babies. Let him watch that.

Sometimes he manages to change the channel when I'm not watching. I keep a thin steel car aerial for those moments.

I continued on into the kitchen and opened the freezer.

"Fat!" the fridge-demon screamed. "You're on a di-et!"

It swung on its over-long arms, wide-toothed face grinning up at me. I used miniaturized orang-utan stock for the base model. Today I didn't have much of a sense of humour.

"Fat – awp!"

The 'fridge demon bounced off the freezer door, smacked face-down onto the floor, and lay still, flattened. I rubbed my knuckles while its nano-fabricators grew it back, plumped it up, like a balloon with air swelling into it. Pop! Demon-shaped again.

It whimpered back into a corner of the fridge, down by the light, sulking.

"You've got nothing to complain about," I muttered automatically.

The heat-treatment of unprepared foodstuffs is one of my hobbies, sometimes I can lose myself in it quite satisfactorily. Today I lost the better part of one finger to an over-enthusiastic cheese-grater, and stood biting my lip and dripping over the sink as muscle tissue and skin were nanoscopically rebuilt – never

quite fast enough to stem the pain. I lost my appetite.

Sun leaked through the kitchen window between the high-rise blocks. Mostly we find it fashionable, here, to use nano-fabricators only on biological things. There are other quarters of the city where inanimate objects are as mutable as flesh. You can never find your way to the same place twice, usually because it isn't there.

"Thomas!"

He stumped up, determined, on his sturdy feet. Pleased to be called by name, I think. Mostly I whistle for him and he comes. For a moment I touched the warm flesh of his arm, then I slipped the collar over his head and tightened the choke-chain leash, and opened the door into Spring.

I love the streets when they smell of grass and petrol. There are three city parks close to my apartment, I chose the nearest. For a while, enjoying the warmth of the sun, I carried Little Thomas, holding him by one leg and listening to the piercing screams. In the park there are pigeons. I sat on a bench and let him run around in the sun. There is a road crosses the park, and the traffic is not too careful. There's a chance of him being hit by something – a truck, maybe – so comprehensively that all my nanotech couldn't put Little Thomas back together again. It adds a pleasurable tension to the afternoon. I really don't want to have to start at the beginning and give birth again. Twice was enough.

"Ms?"

This one I recognized. He was another pet-walker, a man in his 30s with an appallingly acned skin. I kept an eye on the grass and the pond, where Little Thomas was busy running up to the bio-ducks and running away again, giggling. This guy's pet hung back, eyes wary.

"No," I said. "No, I don't want to hear your story. I don't want to hear how your father fucked you and your younger brother for eight years, and you only went to the police when he started in on the baby. I don't want to hear how your uncle and your cousins used to fuck you from the age of five, and how you liked it because it was the only time they ever noticed you were there."

He looked bewildered. I pointed to his pet, with a certain economy of movement. Even today I am chary of wasting energy; you never know when you will need it.

"Male owner, male pet," I explained. "Only the details are going to be different."

He had nice eyes. I thought of when I put my thumbs into Little Thomas's eyes and they pop like fibrous tomatoes. I couldn't attack this man with the pizza-skin, he weighed 15 stone if he was an ounce, and he (being male) had 30 per cent more upper-body strength than I had.

I got up, the afternoon spoiled, deciding to go home for a vigorous play-session with Little Thomas, and a languorous finger-fuck in the afternoon's remaining sun.

"I thought..." the man said hesitantly. "We might have something in common. Something to talk about."

What he thought he could possibly have to say to me defeats me. Sorry would be nice. What would be

nice, actually, would be if he took out a rusty bread-knife and sawed open his stomach, and sawed off his cock, and let that say sorry for him. But, optimistic as I am about life, I didn't think this was going to happen.

I walked off without looking back, whistling, and strolled so that Little Thomas could catch up. One of the ducks had taken his eye out, I saw. The nanotech repairers were busy, a grey iridescent film over the empty socket. For some time I amused myself by walking on his blind side and listening to him cry.

The city rises up around me. Even if I weren't working on the web, there is no one I would go to meet. No one I would talk to. I inhabit a different planet. Those who could talk, like the man with the diseased skin, I prefer not to communicate with. I have a strong dislike of communication.

I walk back through residential streets, dodging little piles of excrement on the paving stones. A whiny cry of "Tired!" pursues me. I bend down and pick Little Thomas up.

His clothes are beyond repair. I strip him and drop them in the gutter. He clings, his naked arms around my neck, nuzzling. A warm body, legs locked around my jutting hip. As I said, he isn't bright. He is affectionate.

That is the only thing I fear.

No – there are two things:

One day I'll get bored with Little Thomas – it just won't be enough any more.

Or else I'll start to love him.

Mary Gentle is the author of such highly praised sf and fantasy novels as *Golden Witchbreed* (1983), *Rats and Gargoyles* (1990) and *Grunts* (1993). Born in 1956, she lives in Stevenage. Her previous story for Interzone was "The Road to Jerusalem" (issue 52).

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Prime U.S. Beef

David Eddings interviewed by Stan Nicholls

If I could figure out a way to persuade Barbara Cartland to refer to her books as something else I'd do it," asserts David Eddings. "Because the technically correct term for what I'm writing is romance. My work is a direct outgrowth of medieval romance and I, unlike Tolkien, adore Tennyson, and Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*."

Eddings, whose Belgariad, Malloreon, Elenium and Tamuli series have gained him international bestseller status, began reading fantasy and sf at around 13. "When I was perhaps 17 I started writing," he says, "but dabbling in fantasy never really occurred to me. Well, I did do one or two short stories in the science-fiction mode in my mid-20s, but didn't like them all that much. They didn't work, maybe because I have no science training whatsoever. I think I know the formula for water and I believe I know Newton's Third Law. That's about as far as it goes. I'm horribly incompetent at anything mechanical, and mathematically I'm inept. Which is why my wife balances the cheque books.

"I was convinced I was going to become an actor. I wasn't bad at it, and in high school and junior college I was sort of minoring in speech, doing debates and things of this nature. Then I got a scholarship and went to Reed, a rather prestigious college in Oregon. I didn't get on that well with the fellow running the drama department there, and I was a compulsive reader, so I concentrated on English instead. I did fairly well and got a good background in academic English studies."

When he was in graduate school he became enamoured of Middle English. "Maybe that was fate, because I can relate the interest directly to what I'm doing now. I took two or three seminars on Chaucer, and one on Malory. It was getting very close to being a Major, but actually my Major was Modern American Fiction – Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck and that general era. But I spent a great deal of time studying Middle English and got fairly competent in it. Competent enough that, just for fun, I have a speech in the middle of my current novel, *The Shining Ones*, delivered in Middle English. I checked it carefully against various references and it's very accurate. I can write in Middle English! It could start a trend.

"Anyway, Reed College required a thesis for a Bachelor's degree. Normally a Bachelor's is sort of like being stamped 'Prime US Beef.' They just walk you through, hand out the diplomas and you fill in your name later on. But I wrote a novel for my degree, and I'm very happy I didn't submit that to a publisher. I sympathize with my professors who had to read it. Nevertheless, I wrote a novel; I actually managed to finish the thing, and it was acceptable enough to get me my degree. I wrote also a portion of a novel for my Masters thesis at the University of Washington. Simply because I devoted just one semester to it, six months, I only got about half way through. But I think it was a much better book than the one I wrote at Reed."

What kind of novels were they? "Contemporary. They had nothing

whatsoever to do with the field for which I am perhaps unjustly famous."

College was followed by a spell in the army. But whether he was conscripted or joined is something Eddings still can't make up his mind about. "That's a moot point. It was at the end of the Korean nonsense and we had the draft at that time. But my draft board was very understanding. They would send me a letter every Fall saying, 'Do you intend to continue your education or are you available for military service?' I'd reply with, 'I'm going back to school this year,' and get a deferment. They'd been so decent about the whole thing that after I finally got my Bachelor of Arts degree I thought, 'Well, they're not really shooting at each other that seriously in Korea right now, let's get this over with.' So I wrote a letter saying, 'I do not intend to return to school this coming year and am available for military service.'

"I made the mistake of telling them I'd done three years in the National Guard, although I was criminally underage to do it, and when they ran out of cadre men [non-commissioned officers] they gave me my very own platoon and said, 'Here are 63 men, try to keep as many of them alive as you possibly can.' That was one of the more harrowing experiences of my life. Weeks went by when I didn't see the inside of my eyelids. But, hey, I did keep them all alive. We lost one, but that was because he ran away, and I still feel a little guilty about that. But one out of 63 isn't a

bad average. Fortunately they didn't send me to Korea; they sent me to Germany, and with two years of college German I got along fairly well."

After his discharge from the army he began looking for a job. "Simply to support myself, because my family was not well-off, I went into working in grocery stores. I discovered that a good journeyman grocery clerk can go into any town and probably have a job within 48 hours. I've fallen back on this periodically, although I must say that getting out of the grocery business ranked right up there with getting out of the army as one of the happier experiences of my life. It was good to me but I didn't really care that much for it.

"Then I got employment with Boeing in the aerospace industry in Seattle. I wound up being what was quaintly called a missile bum. I got married at that time and we sort of bounced around the country emplacing Minuteman missiles, finally settling for a while in New Orleans, where I worked on the Saturn project as a buyer. I spent more taxpayers' money than I'll ever be able to replace. Everything we were doing, simply because of the size of this monster we were building, had never been done before. I was buying very exotic things, none of which I understood. I'd take the specs to the engineers and say, 'Does this make any sense? Keeping in mind the fact that I'm committed to spending about five million dollars.' They'd look it over and say, 'Oh, yeah, that seems all right.' But I was never sure I believed them.

"So there we were in New Orleans. But my wife, Leigh, was an asthmatic, and asthma is a fatal disease in New Orleans due to the climate. I remember getting her to the hospital one night just in time. I figured we had to get above that Mississippi delta. Boeing was unsympathetic, so I parted company with them and we went to the upper mid-West, which is drier if nothing else. I taught English in a business college for about a year. Then I taught in a small teachers' college for three or four years, at which point all the administrators got a pay raise and the teaching faculty didn't. They got my back up about that and I told them to take their job and do whatever

they wanted with it. And, good heavens, abandoned tenure in the process. I could still be there, teaching Dostoevsky or something."

That seemed as good a time as any to try his hand at professional writing. "Having saved a few dollars, we lived frugally for a year and I wrote what was to be my first published novel, *High Hunt*. Then we moved to Denver, I went back to the grocery business and in my spare time hammered out all the kinks built into the book. I finally sent it off, and rather surprisingly – well, it was astonishing to me – Putnam took it and published it in 1973." *High Hunt*, which appeared in the UK for the first time in 1993, is a tough outdoor adventure. It centres around a group of men on a deer hunt in the mountainous region of Washington State. Away from their urban environment, violent tensions and rivalries surface. "It did very well, and there was even some talk about a film. But it came out at almost exactly the same time as *Deliverance* and *The Taking of Pelham 1-2-3*, which were kind of similar subjects.

"Another bit of bad timing as far as my position on the bestseller lists was concerned was that it also came out simultaneously with *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull*. And the bird knocked me out.

"We left Denver and moved to Spokane [Washington State], where I was born, incidentally. I always wondered why my family left so soon after my birth, but when we got there I realized my father was a great deal smarter than I thought he was. It is a terribly, terribly boring town. There is nothing to do in Spokane. If you've read my novel *The Losers*, which I wrote during that period, you'll see it says a number of nasty things about Spokane, most of which are probably true."

The Losers remained unpublished until 1992. Its protagonist, promising student and athlete Raphael Taylor, loses a leg in a car accident when drunk. He falls through the safety net and finds himself living in a run-down neighbourhood of Spokane, surrounded by outcasts and insensitive social workers. Eddings' desire to write the novel dated

from his days in the grocery trade. "The grocery store in *The Losers* where Raphael works has almost a floor plan for one of the stores in which I worked," he explains. "Many of the characters – those poor, broken-down, pathetic people – I used to wait on. Most of them were on welfare, and they'd come in to redeem pop bottles so they could scrape together enough money to buy food."

Why the down on social workers? "Experience. I developed an antipathy for them while I was there, and I used the social worker in *The Losers* as the Devil's mouthpiece. Any time I wanted to say something outrageous I'd put it in her mouth. Here's a girl who's gone through some upstate college, majored in boyfriends, had the obligatory abortion in her teenage years and came out with a minimal degree in social work with a C-minus average. Then they give her a caseload of 40 or 50 people over whom she has absolute power. Absolute power. And this incompetent, who knows nothing whatsoever about what life on the streets is all about, makes decisions that affect their entire lives. All social workers want is to get everyone involved in a programme. Because a programme provides full employment for three generations of social workers. And they mess up. I saw it. I saw these poor people, their clients, continually having battles with the Department of Social Services. There was nothing you could do for them except offer sympathy. I suppose *The Losers* was my attempt at offering blanket sympathy to those people.

"Right after *The Losers* I wrote several other, monumentally unpublizable, books, and was beginning to think maybe I should give some thought to a career in poetry or something. I was struggling along and making half-hearted attempts to get back into teaching. But the market for unemployed English teachers wasn't very great."

He would have carried on trying to make his mark as a mainstream novelist if it hadn't been for a chance discovery in a book shop. "I was heading toward the back of the store, where they kept the serious fiction," he



David Eddings

recalls, "and walked past the stack. Down on the bottom shelf was a copy of *The Two Towers*, the second volume of *The Lord of the Rings*. I looked at it and thought, 'Is this old turkey still kicking around?' I picked it up and saw it was published by Ballantine. Now Ballantine, unlike many other American publishers, lists printing histories. I turned the title page and saw this book was in its 73rd printing. This gave me pause for thought.

"I was supposed to be working on a book at the time, and it was boring me to tears. This is terrible, when a writer is bored by his own work, but it was a real bomb and had reached the point where I couldn't even stand to look at it any more. I'd got into the habit of goofing-off this book by doodling, and I'd started to draw a map of an imaginary world, which I eventually put aside and forgot about. After I'd seen the 73rd printing of the second book of *Lord of the Rings*, I went back and pulled that map out again. I made some changes; putting in different names for some of the kingdoms, that sort of thing. Then I began thinking about the people who

lived in these places and wrote in that this race is like the people of Poland in the 8th century, or this one is like the Romans of the third century BC, and so forth. Finally I came up with a complete mythology, various theologies, and a serious bad guy, who turned out to be a sort of renegade god. That led to inventing various other characters. What I was doing was generating preliminary studies for what became the *Belgariad* and *Malloreon* series. It took me about a year and ran for 230-something pages."

There was no doubt in his mind that he wanted his fantasies to be in series. "None whatsoever. Because, you see, my original perception of how you did these things was based almost entirely on *The Lord of the Rings*. Being completely innocent, I thought it was standard practice to write these books as trilogies. At that time I was unaware that Poppa Tolkien wanted to do the whole of *Lord of the Rings* as one solid volume, and was really, really upset when his publisher, Unwin, said they were going to break it up. But I believed that if you were going to write a long fantasy it was supposed to be in three books, so I

proposed *Belgariad* as a trilogy to Ballantine. I didn't even know Del Rey Books existed; I simply sent my letter of enquiry to Ballantine because they were Tolkien's publisher. I figured I'd start at the top and work my way down and wind up with Pocket Books, Ace, Baen or whatever it might be.

"The postal service contributed greatly to my career as a fantasy author by losing that letter of enquiry. I wrote a snappy note and ultimately got a response from Lester Del Rey himself. I should say that I grew to love Lester dearly but he and I fought continuously. We used to scream at each other over the telephone, burning up the wires, and his wife, bless her, would try to step in and make peace between the two of us. But he gave me a very quick education on the realities, which is to say the economics, of publishing here in the States. The market is dominated by two major booksellers, B. Dalton and Waldenbooks, and they have certain rules about genre fiction. In those days one of those rules was that the cover price of paperbacks could not be over three dollars. This has modified as the result of economic changes, of

course, but we're talking about 1978, 1979 or thereabouts. Lester said, 'What you're proposing is a trilogy that's probably going to run between 1500 and 1800 pages long. If you break it into three you're going to have 600-page books. There is no way these booksellers will accept them in that format.' Then he made a famous statement. 'This is what we are going to do,' he said. 'We're going to break it up into five books.' 'We' meaning me.

"I wasn't very happy about that. I had absolutely perfect climaxes for each of the three volumes, all laid out, ready to go. And here he was proposing major violence to the story to make it come out in a way that pleased the booksellers. I was terribly offended. But since I'd already signed a contract I didn't have too much choice and had to go along with him. He did point out that I'd receive advances for five books as opposed to advances for three books, which was going to net me a significant additional amount of money, and that sort of softened the blow. So I floundered around for a month and finally came up with a plan which kind of worked. I still think it might have been better had *Belgariad* been presented in three books as opposed to five. But it's been around for so long that if I tried to change it now I'm sure the howls of protest would be heard as far as the moon."

Eddings admires Tolkien greatly, as evidenced by his affectionate use of the term "Poppa" in reference to him, but has some reservations about the legacy of Lord of the Rings. "There's no doubt the man's a giant. The thing is that Poppa was such a giant in the 60s that he seems to have established the parameters of what fantasy is. Even to the point that my former editor Lester Del Rey could say, 'Fantasy is the most prissy of all art forms.' He meant that what people will accept in, say, bodice-rippers they find absolutely unacceptable in fantasy. In other words, part of Tolkien's heritage is a certain prudishness. With one or two possible exceptions there aren't any female hobbits, and his heroines end at the neck; you have the beautiful hair and eyes but that's about it. This was like waving a red flag in my face, and I went out of

my way to start pushing at the edges. Not to turn my fantasy into pornography or anything of this nature, but just to see if I could get away with taking it a little bit further in that regard. I'm having a great deal of fun pushing against those boundaries of prissiness and inserting an erotic element into my work.

"This ties in with recognizing the fact, and disliking the fact, that people in America are absolutely convinced the melody for *Greensleeves* is a Christmas hymn. It was composed in praise of a prostitute, of course. Come on, I've read Chaucer, I know there were prostitutes in the Middle Ages. And if I'm dealing realistically with the Middle Ages I'm going to have to have pickpockets, I'm going to have to have thieves, and I'm going to have to have prostitutes. I think the third character who appears in the *Elenium* is a prostitute, a little streetwalker being rained on. I introduced her to establish that it's a real world, and to establish that, despite its preconceptions theologically, medieval society had probably at least as many prostitutes as it had knights whose strength was as the strength of ten because their hearts were pure."

His fantasy world has its basis in the Middle Ages but everything else, the culture, politics, magical system and so on, was devised from scratch. Isn't this one of the more difficult aspects of being an author in the genre? "It can be very difficult, yes, and you have to be conversant with many, many things. You can have a character say, 'Gee, they bounced one of my cheques' in a contemporary story and everybody will know what they're talking about. But in fantasy you have to invent the entire banking system. You have to invent the theology, sociology and everything else. And when you begin as I did, by dropping three or four aeons of western European culture into a blender — when you throw in peoples who are essentially ancient Romans, French and Spanish noblemen, Vikings and Muslims — when you put all that together and press the 'on' button you get a very strange mix of anachronisms. It gets you thinking about what sort of world it would be with Romans

and Arabs living next to each other, for instance."

The temptation to also invent some kid of magical McGuffin to get his hero out of a tight corner is something he works hard to avoid, however. "It's the Superman complex, isn't it? If you're more powerful than a locomotive and can leap tall buildings at a single bound, what do you have to worry about? Take the all-powerful sorcerer. There is nothing he has to fear. The guy is bullet-proof. I spoke with Lester Del Rey about this rather extensively. He said the only way you can get around it is to come up with believable limitations, and you have to be very specific about what those limitations are right at the outset. My gimmick is that magic is tiring. Wizardry poops you out. So doing something with magic is as hard as doing it with your back, it's just that it happens almost instantaneously. I refined the gimmick so that when a character does something with magic it makes a 'noise' other sorcerers can hear. If you're trying to tiptoe through the tulips and sneak your way through the back alleys, using magic, you're going to sound-off burglar alarms all over town. Everybody who is the least bit talented at this sort of thing is going to 'hear' what you're doing, which is a significant factor if stealth is important.

"On the subject of magic, incidentally, the fact that she is a little too specific about her spells is perhaps my one and only argument with Katherine Kurtz. Start telling readers how to do a spell, whether or not it works, and they're going to try it. If you've got some 14 year-old kid with terminal acne who's absolutely convinced that if he recites this particular spell he'll be able to fly, and goes and jumps off a 70-storey building, it's your fault, dammit! I feel a sense of responsibility, so I'm pretty vague when I get to sorcery. I use the gimmick of the will is the word. Which means that when a character wants to use magic they simply say, 'Happen!', 'Let it be so!' or whatever. The more susceptible reader can go ahead and concentrate as hard as they want and I don't think that, like Uri Geller, they can bend a key with only their mind. If they can, they probably have a future in showbiz."

Having sold so many books, presumably Eddings' appeal is over quite a wide range. Does he have any idea of his readership profile? "I get fan mail. Do I ever get fan mail. Naturally, because I'm writing in a genre that appeals to adolescents, a heavy percentage of my readership is adolescent, and to use a Nevada idiom, I don't cut 'em no slack. I've got eight years of college English behind me, and extensive reading in the classics, and I do my level best to stretch my vocabulary and hopefully theirs at the same time. Call it my little gesture toward social conscience, but I like to think I'm teaching a certain number of people to read. Now that sounds pretentious!

"But it isn't only younger readers who write to me. I'm getting the middle range, too, and some of them are naming their children after the characters in these books. I'm also getting people of advanced years. Even more advanced than mine, which is a little hard to accept. Some days I feel like I'm older than dirt.

"Occasionally I get unwelcome attention too, of course. I received some really strange correspondence from an absolute, total nut. This guy was a former Scientologist. He'd been expelled from the Church of Scientology, if you can imagine that, largely because he was convinced L. Ron Hubbard was not really dead but being held prisoner by the hierarchy of the Church. And he was writing letters to everybody. I know he sent some to [comedian] George Burns. As a matter of fact they weren't so much letters as packets costing about five dollars each to send through the mail, because they were as big as dictionaries. The import of this mass of material was, 'Let's rescue L. Ron Hubbard.'

"What he wrote made me a little bit nervous. This is when Ronald Reagan was President, and although I had no particular brief for Reagan I don't approve of assassination as a means of political change. And there seemed to be a slightly threatening overtone in these missives. So I called the FBI, and they in turn put me in touch with the secret service. I read them the letter, they checked and said, 'Yeah, we have a file on him. But don't worry, he's harmless.'

"This man identified himself as

'the Son of God.' You'll be happy to know that the Redeemer is alive and well, as far as I know, and living in Scottsdale, Arizona. I got him off my back by something that probably sent him straight to the funny farm. Since he identified himself as the son of God I wrote to him under the letterhead 'From the desk of the Lord God Almighty to His Son.' The letter said, 'Your mother and I are a little concerned about your behaviour. You shouldn't reveal your identity. Remember what happened last time.' I didn't hear from him for about ten years after that. Then a couple of years ago he started writing again and I sent him another one. I haven't heard anything since. It was a rotten thing to do but I didn't need aggravation from this wacko."

After years of almost nomadic wanderings, David and Leigh Eddings may now have settled permanently in Carson City, Nevada. "This sounds almost mercenary, but largely we were encouraged to come here because of a tax law. The government lawyers rummaged through their books and discovered an occupations tax, where if you had income from composition, painting, writing, virtually anything creative, it was taxable in the state of Washington. Frank Herbert was the fellow who unfortunately received the brunt of this discovery when they attempted to tax him for his books. I protested First Amendment rights and a number of other things, and finally decided I didn't want to become another example. That and the fact we were living in Spokane at the time, where we went for 154 days a year with three feet of snow on the ground, sent us south. We checked it out and found that Nevada has the lowest tax rate in the United States, because of the casinos. People from California come over and carry our taxes for us. Many times we'd be happy if they'd just mail the money, but we haven't been able to persuade them to do that yet.

"Carson City is the most peaceful little town you have ever seen, with about 40,000 people spread out over several miles. It's absolutely beautiful if you like to look at sagebrush, and there are probably

more mountains in Nevada than there are in any other state in the country. But we don't have a lot of snow on top of them because in the summer the temperature goes up to 110 and that tends to melt it off rather quickly. I'm done moving now. I'm setting down roots. I like this place.

"It's very pleasant and quiet almost to the point of boredom, which makes it ideal for a writer. I'm taking advantage of that quietude to write a pair of prequels to Belgariad and Malloreon, so we'll ultimately wind up with a 12-book epic. If it's good enough for Homer it's got to be good enough for me! Now that I know how the story ends I can go back and write the beginning. I'm doing them in conjunction with my wife and she's finally going to get credited. She's suffered through this, and her editorial input has been more valuable than anything I've got from any recognized publishing house. And these two books are going to be noticeably heavier than the others. I've been trying to hold the novels at 600 typed pages, but unfortunately—for the people who have to pay for them, both publishers and readers—these are going to be thick, heavy and consequently a little more expensive."

The modus operandi he's applying to the new books has hardly changed since he established it with High Hunt. "I always start with an outline, which is flexible but very, very detailed. I'm dealing in a world that never was, and if I permit myself to wander off I can disappear into the jungle and never be seen again. I have to know where I'm going. I wouldn't want to say I'm outline-bound, because I'm always open to suggestions, but I do have it laid out. I may stray once in a while, but I stay pretty close to the road map. I tend not to wind up in Australia when I'm heading for Portugal.

"Because I get up at an unholly hour in the morning my work day is completed by the time the sun rises. I have a slightly bad back which has made an enormous contribution to American literature. I can only sleep for a few hours, then I'm going to get up whether I want to or not, and as long as I'm up anyway I may as well go to work. So I go to bed at eight and my morning starts at two. The thing I really

appreciate is the quiet. I have the chance to concentrate and I can turn out six hours of fairly good stuff. It's worked rather well for me and I finally acclimatized my wife to the idea that I'm going to get up at two o'clock no matter what time she wants to go to bed. So we're early-to-bed, early-to-rise types. There were times when I was the exact opposite. I didn't start working until midnight and went on to like four o'clock in the morning, then slept till noon. But those days are long gone.

"The unfortunate thing about working for yourself is that you have the worst boss in the world. I work every day of the year except at Christmas, when I work a half day. I think it was the musician Rubinstein who said, 'If I don't practice for one day I notice it. If I miss two days my wife notices it. If I miss three days the audience notices it.' I feel that if I were to take a week off I'd have to go back and learn how to write all over. I don't want to do that. It's also a matter of relying on a routine. You know if you go to the same place, use the same kind of pen, have the same kind of lighting and so on, it becomes an unbreakable habit.

"We have on occasion taken what my wife likes to call a holiday; we go to Reno and stay in a hotel. But I finally reached a point where I couldn't stand it. I can only spend so much time at a blackjack or roulette table because I have this thing nagging at me. Now we get a two-room suite and I take the current manuscript along. I still get up at two o'clock in the morning and go to work like I'm supposed to do! It makes Leigh a bit grumpy but I think she understands. I thank God I have someone who is so supportive, and recognizes the fact that I've made a fair living at this so it's worthwhile. She allows me my little peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. She keeps me productive and gives me enormous amounts of input. I'd be hopelessly incompetent in producing a female character without her assistance. I'm sorry, but no man understands how a woman's mind works. I've got a female parakeet and I can't even understand how her mind works, for crying out loud."

Although he doesn't overrule the possibility of further ventures into mainstream fiction, Eddings

thinks he'll be sticking with fantasy. "I went to a convention in Spokane, which is kind of a weird place to hold one, and met F.M. Busby, who was fun. We got into a long discussion comparing the climate of the world at any time when one or the other of the given genres of speculative fiction, fantasy or sf, was most popular. We concluded that if people's general belief was that things were going to go okay, then science fiction, where we look to the future, was very popular. If things were going to hell then everybody wanted to read fantasy, because it took us back to a simpler

time when there were verities, when we could believe what our leaders were telling us and they only lied when it was necessary.

"I hesitate to predict whether this theory is true. But if the general opinion of Mankind is optimistic then we're in for a period of extreme popularity for science fiction. If the general opinion is pessimistic, fantasy is going to hold its own.

"I'm enough of a pessimist that I'm going to continue writing fantasy."

WANTED – BOOKS ABOUT POPULAR FICTION & FILM

For my reference collection on popular fiction, I'm in search of reading copies of the following books. I'm not necessarily interested in first editions; paperbacks, where they exist, will do. If you can provide decent copies at reasonable prices please send details to David Pringle, Interzone, 217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL, England (tel. 0273 504710).

Bennett, F.A. *Fame and Fiction: An Enquiry Into Certain Popularities*. 1901.

Ellis, Stewart Marsh. *Mainly Victoria*. 1925.

Heakin, Leo J. *Darwinism in the English Novel 1860-1910*. 1940.

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Greene, Suzanne Ellery. *Books for Pleasure: Popular Fiction 1914-45*. 1974.

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Smith, Herbert F. *The Popular American Novel, 1865-1920*. 1980.

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Changelings

Brian Stableford

Frankie sat down at the dressing-table. She placed the open bottle of Armagnac to her right, and the cereal-bowl containing the pills to her left. Between them, mocking and accusative, sat a blank sheet of paper.

It's not everybody who has a chance to plan their last words, she thought. This is a privilege. It's an opportunity to be witty and wise, or at least honest. Why don't I have any idea what to write? Am I supposed to be compiling an explanation, an excuse, or a set of insults?

She picked up the felt-tipped pen which lay beside the empty sheet, and tested the end with her left forefinger, leaving a black smudge. Now she couldn't even die clean.

"Oh, what the hell," she said, speaking aloud although she was well aware of the awful incongruity of talking to an empty room, "it's not as if anyone I love or hate is going to find the bloody thing. It'll only be some fireman or policeman, summoned by a not-very-concerned neighbour when I'm finally missed. That could be weeks away. I'll probably stink so badly that mere words would be utterly superfluous."

She threw the pen over her shoulder without looking to see if it would land on the unmade bed or the ragged rug, and reached out to take a handful of pills. The cocktail included two kinds of barbiturate sleeping pills, two kinds of tranquillizers, two kinds of anti-depressants and some anti-histamines, the last being included as anti-emetics rather than poisons. They were the detritus of 30-odd prescriptions issued over the last five years. She'd thought about throwing in her paracetamols for good measure but felt, on due consideration, that would have made the medical molehill unreasonably mountainous. She took the first swig of brandy before lifting the pills to her mouth, just to smooth the way, and was still savouring its bite when the doorbell rang.

If that's Jehovah's Witnesses, she thought, I'll bloody swing for them.

She sat stock still, waiting to see whether the caller would ring a second time. She didn't make any explicit bargain with herself about what she'd do if there was a second ring, but she understood that some such deal with the treacherous hand of fate was implicit in her hesitation.

At the second ring she let the pills trickle back through her listless fingers into the bowl. At the third she put the bottle down, and went to answer the door. She flatly and absolutely refused to think anything as stupid as saved by the bell! but she was uncomfortably aware of her refusal and all that it signified.

She didn't recognize the man who stood on the balcony; so far as she knew she'd never set eyes on him before. He was far too well-dressed to be a Jehovah's Witness, and she knew he couldn't be a Mormon because Mormons always travelled in pairs. In fact, he was far too well-dressed to be calling on a 13th-floor flat in this kind of block, or to be going unaccompanied in this kind of neighbourhood. His figure was nondescriptly average and his benign features were soft and pale, but she knew he must be pretty fit because the lifts weren't working and he didn't seem in the least out of breath.

"Excuse me," he said, politely, "but I'm looking for Frances Harrap."

"That's a coincidence," Frankie said, bitterly. "That's who I used to be."

The man looked faintly puzzled, as well he might, but seemed undisturbed by the sharpness of her tone. He simply didn't understand what she'd said or the way she'd said it. Frankie was sure that nobody could, even if she tried to explain.

"I'm sorry..." he began.

"That's okay," she said, cutting him off. "What do you want?"

"I'm afraid it will take a little time," he said. "Might I come in, do you think?" He didn't offer his name, let alone any identification, but if he was a con man or a rapist he had the right kind of disguise. Frankie had worked in Debenhams for a while; she knew a £300 suit when she saw it, and she knew the rarity-value of detergent-commercial shirts and neatly-knotted silk ties. In any case, she had nothing to lose, moneywise or any other way.

"Sure," she said, opening the door wide and standing back. "I've got all the time in the world. Do you want a cup of tea?"

He blinked. In all probability, she figured, he'd never been offered a cup of tea in that tone of voice before. But he wasn't intimidated. In fact, for all his

softness and neatness, he somehow didn't look as if he were capable of timidity.

"You're a lucky man," she said, as she pointed him in the direction of the stained MFI sofa. "The staircases are usually full of kids who'd mug you for those shoes, let alone the rest of the gear."

"They probably didn't even notice me," he said, equably. "People usually don't."

"Story of my life," she muttered, as she went into the kitchenette to plug the kettle in. "Sainsbury's Brown Label bags all right?" she called out, half a minute later. "I'm fresh out of Earl Grey."

"Whatever you have," he said, raising his voice no more than was strictly necessary.

"Milk and sugar?"

"Just milk, thank you."

"Perhaps as well - I'm fresh out of sugar too. I spent all this week's housekeeping on posh brandy."

The milk hadn't quite gone off, but she couldn't find it in herself to feel much relief. She splashed it straight on to the tea-bags, because she had recently seen a daytime TV programme which assured her that people who cared about appearances never put the milk in first.

She waited in the kitchen for the kettle to boil, then poured the boiling water on. She gave both mugs a quick stir, then squashed the tea-bags against the sides for a few seconds before flipping them into the pedal-bin with practised ease.

He was waiting patiently. If he'd taken the opportunity to study the living-room closely the experience had not filled him with horror, even though the wallpaper must have been on a par with the stuff that Oscar Wilde had died to avoid. She gave him a point, though, for not nodding in the direction of the paperback-stuffed bookshelves and saying: "Have you read them all?" Previous visitors had assured her that her flat probably had more books in it than all the other flats in the block put together. She always replied - with devastating truthfulness - that they were the horrible proof of the emptiness of her existence.

The anonymous caller sipped tea from his mug without any evident distaste. "I'm afraid," he said, "that what I have to tell you is rather incredible."

"Oh good," she said. "I was afraid you were going to be a bore."

"This may seem to be a peculiar question," he went on, slightly overdoing the apologetic manner, "but do you often feel that you're not like other people - that you're completely out of place in this environment?"

"Oh shit," said Frankie, disgustedly, "you're a bloody Scientologist, aren't you?"

"No," he said, without the faintest wince or smile. "Not that. It was a serious question."

"Of course I feel like that," she said. "Doesn't everyone? Well, maybe you don't, given that you have such a nice suit, which probably means that you have a nice car and a nice house and a nice family and a nice tax accountant, but everyone who lives in this place does. It's what they call a sink estate - the kind the council have difficulty filling. Not that I'm ungrateful, you understand; if it wasn't for places that nobody wants to live, unattached and childless

people like me wouldn't have a cat in hell's chance of getting to the head of the housing queue."

"But with you the feeling's more profound," he said, intoning it as a statement rather than a question. "Whatever they feel, most of the people living here are perfectly understandable products of their environment, and most have adapted to it as well as they can. They may not like it, but they fit in. They mostly don't have jobs, but they do have careers of a kind. They have their social circles, and they have their children. You don't. You can't hold on to any social relationships for long, and you can't conceive. You have difficulty sleeping at night and alcohol doesn't even make you drunk, let alone happy, because you get sick before you get high."

Frankie could have complained about one or two of the brush-strokes, but the big picture was devastatingly accurate. "What exactly are you selling?" she asked, coldly. The sales pitch was far too near the knuckle and she couldn't figure out how or why she'd been targeted, given that the social relationships she could never hold on to for long included any and all jobs, thus rendering her purse as impotent as her screwed-up womb.

"You're a changeling, Miss Harrap," he said, baldly. "You really don't fit in here. You're not even human." His manner was still perfectly amiable, and he didn't seem to be conscious of the fact that he was saying dreadful things.

He means it, she thought. He really does.

"That's funny," she said. "The doctors didn't notice anything out of place when they took my genetic fingerprint a while ago."

He condescended to raise an eyebrow at that.

"It's all the rage around here," she added sarcastically. "Every time there's a rape or a messy murder down at ground zero, the police appeal for volunteers so that the innocent can be eliminated from their enquiries. It's the one respect in which this humble architectural carbuncle is right on the cutting edge of social progress. One day, everybody will be gene-mapped at birth, so that all rapists can be instantly identified. Anyone who's not human will show up as well, of course."

"No they won't," the man said, quietly. "We can get around problems like that. The greater part of your body is engineered to seem human even at the biochemical level, but the greater part of your body isn't really you at all. The real you is inside your head, Miss Harrap; what you're walking around in is just a disguise."

She thought about that for a minute or two. It was difficult to believe that he was any ordinary kind of lunatic, given his gear, but she still couldn't see the point of his spinning her a line. What on earth did he hope to gain?

"What you're saying," she said, "is that I'm a little lost alien. Not so much ET, more like *Invasion of the Body-Snatchers*. I'm a pod, and the reason I've had such a shitty life is that I don't know I'm a pod and never figured out how to get together with all the other pods."

"That's exactly right," he said. "I know that you can't quite believe it yet, but it is true. Your superior intelligence and mental flexibility drew you to the correct conclusion like a magnet. All you have to do

now is accept it. That's why I'm here."

"You're a pod too, I suppose?" she said. "An alien invader – part of a secret army from some other star-system, come to conquer earth. I saw the movie – in fact, I saw all 20 movies."

"You'll find it easier to understand if you can take aboard the ideas without the paranoia," he told her, without sounding as if he were ticking her off. "Yes, we're from another star-system. Yes, for the sake of being able to live among mankind we disguise ourselves as human beings – but our real purpose is to observe without our presence as observers affecting the phenomena under observation. We're not soldiers, we're anthropologists."

Frankie drained the dregs from her mug and set it down on the side-table. At least it's not boring, she thought. If it turns out to be a clever sales pitch now, I'll be quite disappointed.

"How, exactly, do you insert your agents into human society?" she asked, trying to match his benign politeness. "Why don't I remember being sent forth on my mission to observe?"

"Participant observation is a delicate business," the alien told her blandly. "It can go badly awry if the people under observation know they're being observed, but it can also produce poor results if the observers don't become fully cognizant of the customs and folkways of those they're observing. Our method – and we don't claim it's perfect, merely that it's the best available – is to use changelings. We substitute our agents for human babies within a few hours of birth. Our agents aren't infants themselves, but their higher mind functions are suppressed, and they aren't self-conscious. As the changeling is reared by its foster-parents it develops as if it were a normal human infant, but at a strategic moment – usually at the onset of adolescence – we make contact with the agent and induce him or her to drink this."

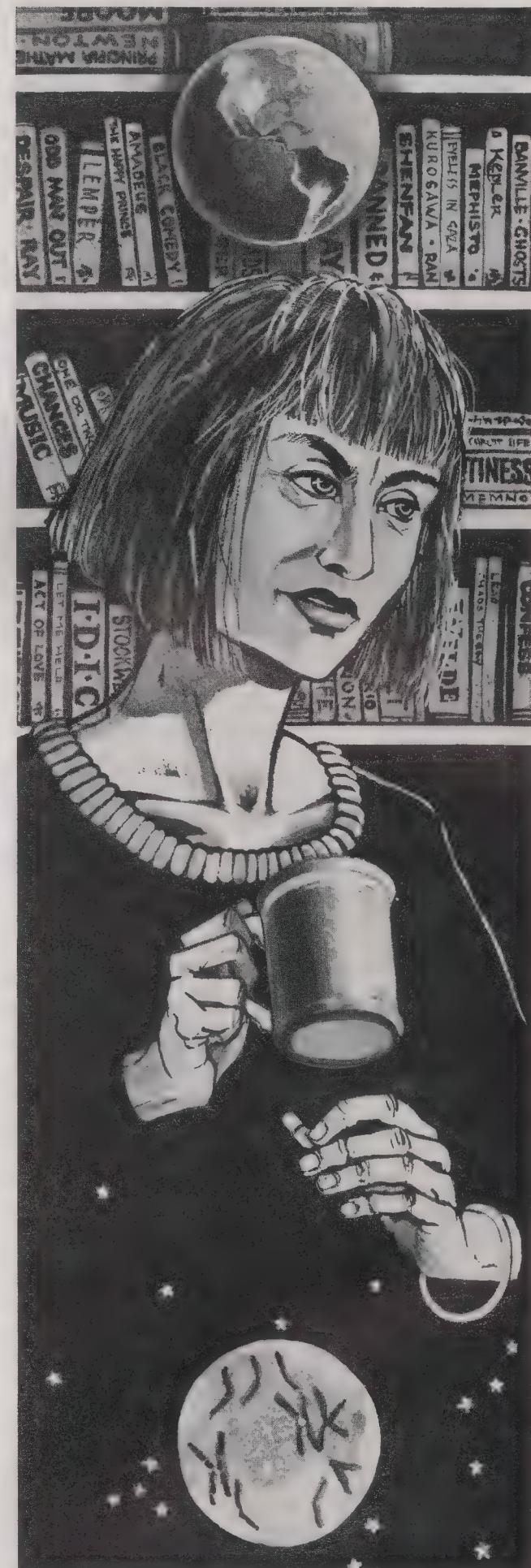
From an inner pocket of his jacket the man produced a small glass vial full of viscous pink liquid. It looked rather like a miniature strawberry milk shake.

"And what does that do?" Frankie asked

"It begins the awakening progress by which the agent regains full consciousness of his or her nature and previous experience. This recovered self-consciousness is superimposed on the human-imitative host self-consciousness which the growing pseudo-human has developed, who therefore becomes a kind of mental hybrid, able to move within human society and able to interpret what goes on there while simultaneously remaining detached from it. It isn't true objectivity, but it's the next best thing, methodologically speaking. You do understand all this, don't you?"

"Oh yes," Frankie said. "I did Sociology A level once, at the tech. I had some crazy idea about training to be a social worker – helping other people with backgrounds and problems as bad as mine. I didn't stick it, of course, but the sociology was interesting, in a bizarre sort of way. But that was a long time ago, as I'm sure you'll appreciate. I'm a long, long way past puberty, Mr Pod."

"I know," he said. "We...lost you. It wasn't easy to find you, in the circumstances."



A terrible suspicion began to dawn on her. "You mean..." she began.

"I mean that the person charged with the job of making the exchange of babies somehow made a mess of it," he said. "As you can imagine, it's not easy switching babies within 24 hours of birth, and we certainly don't like to be caught doing it. We're usually very careful, but somehow, you were switched for the wrong baby. We keep the babies we take for research purposes for a few weeks, before putting them back into human society via adoption agencies, but a couple of weeks went by before we did a gene-analysis of the baby we ended up with, and realized that it wasn't the one we'd intended to take. We'd intended to place you with a Mr and Mrs Howarth - pleasant and prosperous people who'd be able to give you a stable home with all the advantages - whom we'd researched very thoroughly, as we always do. Instead, it seems, we gave you to two travellers who'd only paused in Naburn so that your mother could give birth.

"When we tried to find you, it was already too late. The parents gave a false name at the hospital, probably because the father - assuming that the man your mother was with was the father - had jumped bail and didn't want the police to find him. They didn't register the birth, and took good care to vanish. There aren't very many of us in this part of the world - or, indeed, in the world as a whole - but we did try to track you down. We never actually stopped trying, in fact, but after a while... well, it began to seem like an impossible task."

"Yes," Frankie said, remembering what it had been like when she was very young. "It seemed that way to me, too, when I eventually started trying to find out who I really was. The last set of foster-parents I was placed with were quite helpful, but neither they nor the social services had anything to go on - no record at all before the age of six. My mother didn't tell them anything substantial when she handed me in, and without a birth-certificate there was no place to start. I did have a few scraps of information, though... and a few memories. It took a long time and a lot of looking, but in the end I managed to find some other travellers who'd known my mum, and they were able to point me in the right direction. I found out that I was born in Naburn, and when. Then..."

"If you hadn't started making your own enquiries," the bland man interrupted, irritably, "we probably wouldn't have been able to start ours again. If you hadn't gone there... did they tell you that other people had enquired about you?" He was still holding the vial in his hand, in an oddly reverent fashion, patiently waiting for the moment when she might feel able to take it.

"Yes," Frankie murmured. "they certainly did. But I don't think..."

"I'm truly sorry," he said. "It was an unforgivable mistake, but we'll do everything in our power to put things right. When you drink this, things will begin to be set right. Believe me, you won't regret it. I know you've been labouring under the misapprehension that you're human for far too long, and it's only natural that you'll be scared, but it will make things far, far better. Once you've drunk this, and begun to awake from your long nightmare, your life will turn

around completely. From now on, things will be better than you ever imagined possible. I suppose you find all this utterly incredible, but that doesn't matter; you only have to drink this down and the truth of everything I've told you will begin to become manifest."

The funny thing was that she did believe him. She believed every word. If things had been different, she'd have taken it for granted that he was out of his mind, but the fact that he plainly didn't know the whole truth made it so much easier to believe that the partial truth he did know was indeed true.

"If I had a gun in the house," Frankie said, bleakly, "I'd blow your fucking brains out. I really would. For two pins I'd go to the kitchen and take out my one sharp knife and hack you bloodily to bits, and I wouldn't give a tinker's fart about the fact that the police would never believe that I was only stamping on some lousy alien bug."

"Please, Miss Harrap," said the alien anthropologist mildly. "Just drink it down. Then we can begin all over again. Everything will be all right, now."

"You stupid bastard," Frankie said, wishing that she could put more feeling into the insult. "You stupid, incompetent, alien bastard. I'm not the person you think I am. I'm not the real Frances Harrap."

The carefully-faked man was clearly incapable of genuine astonishment or honest alarm, but at least he had the grace to look thoroughly puzzled.

"The Frances Harrap you're looking for," she told him, wearily, "is dead. Her name was Julie Ann Howarth, and she went to stand on a train line, in front of an oncoming inter-city 125, two weeks after she found out who she really was... or who I really was... except that you... oh, fuck it. It wasn't your agent who took the wrong baby, you moron - the nurse had already mixed us up."

The alien simply looked blank, as if his computer-like brain was having trouble coming to terms with this news.

"When I went to the hospital," Frankie told him wearily, "they told me that the Howarths had been trying to find me for years. They didn't mention anyone else - I suppose your people avoided giving them any explanation and the hospital administrators just assumed that all the enquirers were connected. The Howarths found out that Julie Ann wasn't their real daughter when she had to have a blood transfusion after a road accident. At first they tried to ignore the fact, but simple curiosity about the whereabouts of their own flesh-and-blood gradually got the better of them. They tried to conceal what they were doing from Julie Ann, but that just made things worse. She was well on the way to deep unhappiness before I came along and the whole sorry story... or what we all thought was the whole sorry story... came out. That's why I had the tests done on my own DNA - to confirm that I really was the Howarths' daughter. Except that once they'd met me, and found out what my life had been like... suddenly, they weren't so very interested in a glorious reunion. After all, it's not as if I'm pretty, is it?"

"Meanwhile, your missing anthropologist killed herself, for all the reasons you sketched out to me a

1000 minutes ago... and one of two could have been. It was all a bit of a bummer for me too, as you might be able to imagine if you were human. The mix-up seems to have fucked us all up, one way or another."

The anthropologist was still blank and uncomprehending. He seemed to be a bit slow on the uptake for an alien mastermind.

"Your changeling was where you intended her to be all along, you idiot," Frankie said, spelling it out. "You only thought you'd got it wrong because you got the wrong baby in exchange. If what you've told me is really the truth, you could have given Julie Ann the drink on her 13th birthday and she'd have been just fine."

"But we thought..." he began, floundering in the sticky depths of his discovered misconceptions.

"You thought wrong," Frankie informed him. "Your human disguises are a little too perfect. You can't even penetrate them yourselves unless you know for sure."

"Are you sure...?" he began.

It was her turn to interrupt, confident in the superiority of her own wisdom. "Your pseudohuman bodies are supposed to be sterile, right?" she said, angrily. "You told me I couldn't conceive when you were listing the symptoms of my existential malaise with such deadly accuracy."

"Yes," he said.

"Well I can't, now," she said. "But the reason I can't is that I had three abortions in my teens and one of them was botched. I'm a self-made disaster, Mr Pod. I'm alien through and through, and maybe that is because I was a changeling, switched at birth, but it has nothing whatsoever to do with you, and there's not a damn thing in all the world that your precious elixir can do for me. Have you got that through your thick pseudohuman skull yet?"

He had. He looked at her very calmly, in full and obvious possession of his faculties. He carefully put the vial back in the inside pocket of his jacket. "You do realize," he said, dully, "that if you tell anyone the story I've just told you, they won't believe you. They'll think you're mad."

"They wouldn't be far wrong," Frankie assured him.

The unexpected visitor stood up, wriggled in his suit so it sat properly upon his shoulders, and went to the door. "Don't get up," he said, without the least trace of irony. "I'll see myself out."

"You'll never get down those stairs in one piece," she told him. "The local kids'll be queuing up for first crack at you, Stanley knives at the ready."

"I'll be all right," he assured her, with perfect confidence. "I'm usually very competent, you know — I don't make many mistakes."

"Maybe not," she conceded ungraciously. "After all, it's not as if you're only human, is it?"

She heard the outer door close as he went out. He didn't slam it. She wondered if it would have been better or worse if he'd turned out to be a con man, a rapist or a Scientologist. He had, at any rate, been far more plausible than a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness. She wondered, too, if it would really have been so much better if she had been an alien anthropologist accidentally mislaid by her



fellows, or whether it would really have been so much better if the Howarths hadn't been so utterly appalled to find out what had become of their flesh-and-blood daughter after five years on the road with the travellers and a further ten in assorted children's homes and foster-homes.

Surely it wasn't such an ill wind that everybody has to be counted as losers, she thought. Surely Julie Ann could have given herself a break and counted her blessings. Surely I'm no worse off than I was before simply because I know what I missed out on. Surely...

She went into the bedroom, and sat down once again at the dressing-table. She turned round and reached out to take the pen from where it had fallen near the head of the bed. It had left a big black stain on the crumpled sheet.

On the mockingly blank sheet of paper, she wrote: EARTH HAS BEEN INVADED BY ALIEN ANTHROPOLOGISTS. After a pause, she added: BUT DON'T WORRY TOO MUCH ABOUT IT, BECAUSE THEY'RE A RIGHT LOAD OF PILLOCKS.

She threw the pen over her shoulder, harder than before. It hit the wall and fell on to the floor on the far side of the bed. Then she took the brandy bottle in her right hand and a handful of pills in her left.

She took a swig of Armagnac, then set the bottle down again. She sat still for half a minute, waiting. She wasn't thinking about anything in particular — she was too numb for that.

In the end, though, her mind simply wouldn't stay blank.

I wonder what the alien anthropologists will make of us when they have to write it all up, she thought. What will they make of the saintly, sane and sanitized Howarths, and the unsaintly, insane, insanitary Harraps? How will they explain it all? How can they even begin to understand? Will their readers be able to believe it, or will they think it's all just a silly travellers' tale?

She got up, walked over to the window, opened it, and threw out the handful of pills. She watched them fall 13 floors to the ground.

It would have been appropriate, in a way, had they fallen on Mr Pod's head, but he was nowhere to be seen. It was as if he'd vanished into thin air.

She fetched the cereal-bowl and emptied every last pill out of the window. It was a reckless thing to do — after all, there were people living not a million miles away who'd have given her a good few quid for the tranks and the anti-depressants — but she was in a reckless mood.

She went back to the dressing-table, screwed up the bit of paper, and threw it in the corner, where there ought to have been a waste-paper bin. Then she went back into the living-room and started scanning the rows of books, thinking that perhaps, after all, it had been really stupid to think about killing herself when she hadn't even read them all yet. She knew that she'd have to live for a whole week on tea and brandy, until her next giro arrived, but that wasn't so terrible a prospect, given that she'd been meaning to go on a diet for months.

"Suicide might be the only way out if I were Julie Ann Howarth, alias the real Frances Harrap, alias the Body Snatcher from Outer Space," she said, not

caring at all about the awful incongruity of talking to an empty room, "but I'm not. It's not what I've been, or could have been, or ought to have been that matters. I shouldn't need a miniature strawberry milkshake to help me to be me. I ought to be able to do that on my own. and I bloody well will."

Brian Stableford is exceedingly well known to our regular readers, and his complete, exhaustive bibliography would probably fill a whole issue of the magazine. Long may he thrive.

FOR SALE

Interzone: The 2nd Anthology. Paperback edition, New English Library, 1988. Stories by J.G. Ballard, Gregory Benford, Thomas M. Disch, Garry Kilworth, Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman, Rachel Pollack, John Shirley & Bruce Sterling, Brian Stableford, Ian Watson and others — fine tales which the Times described as having "the quality of going right to the edge of ideas which can chill as well as warm." It's now officially out of print, but we have obtained some remainder copies for resale to IZ readers at just over half the original cover price — £1.75 (including postage & packing; £2.75 overseas; \$5 USA).

Earth is the Alien Planet: J.G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare. A monograph by David Pringle, Borgo Press, 1979. (Now back in stock.) Copies are available from Interzone at £3.50 each (including postage & packing; £4.50 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

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Ansible Link

David Langford



The 1994 British Easter SF Convention, held in Liverpool, saw the usual outbreaks of awards. British SF Association Awards went to Chris Evans's *Aztec Century* (best novel), Rob Holdstock's and Garry Kilworth's "The Ragthorn" (short story), Jim Burns's cover for *Red Dust* (artwork — Jim's tenth BSFA award, talented swine that he is). In addition, a BSFA Special Award went to *The Encyclopedia of SF* — with a long and well-received citation read by Iain "M." Banks. The convention presented its own awards to the *Encyclopedia* again (long text); Eric Brown's "The Time-Lapsed Man" (short text), Stephen Briggs's and Terry Pratchett's *The Streets of Ankh-Morpork* (artwork) and *The Wasp Factory* (dramatization). A new award was announced to fill a much-needed gap: the "Phlosque," a word coined to designate notably and noisomely cute sf/fantasy art. Winner Dave Mooring muttered something about having to draw what the punters would buy...

Children of the Damned

Poppy Z. Brite, the New Orleans dark-fantasy writer, seemed popular on her March UK tour. The only complaint I heard: at a packed Penguin event in the Barbican she chose to read a piece from her *Lost Souls* which was... disappointingly mild. Asked why she didn't "gross out the Brits" with any of a hundred more, er, explicit passages of gay vampire sexual carnage, she feebly claimed that her frantic round of book promotion had left her "brain dead." Shame!

Pat Cadigan's mysterious affliction of Progressive Syllable Loss means (she confides) that following *Mind-players*, *Synners* and *Fools* her next novel must of necessity be called S. After which...

Ramsey Campbell offered handy writing hints at Eastercon ("Think of the first line BEFORE you write it down") and insisted that his new mega-collection *Alone with the Horrors* is not about babysitting.

Hal Clement received the first Isaac Asimov Memorial Award, reports *SF Chronicle*.

Harlan Ellison staggered the sf world when a *Washington Post Book World* columnist asked whether he was "amused, flattered, angered by or oblivious to" the Victims of Ellison support group —

see *IZ 82*. In what must be a lifetime first, the great man declared: "No comment." (VOE advertisements quote him as saying more cheerily, "If you're my enemy, you'll go to your grave with my teeth in your throat.")

John Grant of the *Lone Wolf* game-book tie-in novels is muttering about Roc's "Shadowrun" game tie-in novel called...*Lone Wolf* (by Nigel Findley). Luckily Findley's style is decidedly fragging different from Grant's, making fragging endless fragging use of one fragging adjective. Or fragging participle.

Cecelia Holland writes that after examining the claim that her works (notably *Until the Sun Falls* and the mediaeval novels *The Earl aka A Hammer for Princes* and *Great Maria*) were excessively borrowed from in the recent British-published sf trilogy *Sunfall*, the New York Authors Guild feels her case is strong. Oo-er.

Robert Jordan, galaxy-famous author of vast and exhausting fantasies, is apparently the pseudonym of one Jim Rigney; William James of *Sunfall* trilogy fame is really James William Bell; but who lurks behind the mask of gossip columnist Eva D. Fanglord?

Damon Knight took the piss out of an interminable *New York Review of SF* debate on Tom Godwin's famous story "The Cold Equations," arguing that if you tot up everything that must be in the doomed spaceship — from the pilot's blaster right down to airlocks full of air and the incipient bowel movements of pilot and stowaway — you can plausibly find over 110 lb of stuff to jettison (the stowaway's fatal weight). He fantasized an exchange which wouldn't have got past John W. Campbell: "Marilyn, you're going to have to be braver than you have ever been before. I want you to go to the bathroom right here, in the same room with me."

Paul McAuley says he's being persecuted by "a misguided idiot (or an incompetent crook)" insisting that he (the misguided one) and only he is the true author of Paul's "Karl and the Ogre," which he cleverly wrote under the pseudonym Paul McAuley. He's also been trying to flog a collection of shorts, including that one, under the McAuley name. Rude legal letters are being exchanged; Paul asks editors to note that he lives in Fife and that material sent out by any "Paul McAuley" with a Canterbury return address should be

viewed with extreme scepticism.

Bob Shaw reminisced about a science-fictional past: "When I was young we couldn't afford sweets — we just chewed tar off the road."

Robert Shea died of cancer on 10 March 1994. He's best remembered for co-writing the *Illuminatus!* trilogy with Robert Anton Wilson (still with us, despite being the subject of a tiresome Internet death hoax a week earlier).

Infinitely Improbable

The Philip K. Dick award for best original paperback sf was shared by John M. Ford's *Growing Up Weightless* and Jack Womack's *Elvissey*.

Star Trek News: "KIRK SPLIT ON HOMOSEXUALITY," says this headline from the Catholic magazine *The Tablet*, and I do not propose to comment. The journal *Sociology of Religion* (55:1, 1994) has an article on "Star Trek Fandom as a Religious Phenomenon," by Michael Jindra: "Star Trek fandom involves a sacralization of elements of our culture, along with the formation of communities with regularized practices that include a 'canon' and a hierarchy. Star Trek fandom is also associated with a popular stigma, giving fans a sense of persecution and identity common to active religious groups." One has visions of stigmata in the numinous shape of Starfleet insignia...

"**Evolution**" is the 1996 British Easter SF Convention, to be held in the Metropole Hotel, Brighton. Guests will be Verne Vinge, Colin Greenland, Bryan Talbot and Jack Cohen. Contact 13 Lindfield Gdns, Hampstead, London, NW3 6PX. (The 1995 Eastercon, Confabulation, will be in London Docklands: contact 3 York St, Altringham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH.)

Good Bits. From a collection of particularly fine sf/fantasy lines assembled during Eastercon: "She knew how to embroider and milk a cow." — Connie Willis, *Doomsday Book*. "It was an Everest of understatement." — Robert Charles Wilson, *The Harvest*. "He lifted her tee-shirt over her head. Her silk panties followed." — Peter Hamilton, *Mindstar Rising*. "Elayne wished the woman would just revert to herself instead of bludgeoning her with a lady's maid from the Blight." — Robert Jordan, *The Fires of Heaven*.

Mutant Popcorn

Nick Lowe

Somewhere behind the clouds, a blue moon rises; and for two obscure British sf novelists, opportunity knocks. I don't know anything about Richard Herley other than that his 1987 novel *The Penal Colony* – the original title of the film released here as **No Escape**, already retitled *The Prison Colony* for US release, presumably out of concern that a lexically-challenged audience might construe it as a film about willies – is his only book since his popular historical trilogy *The Pagans* appeared in the 1970s. I doubt many people have read or even heard of this novel (which was packaged as a mainstream thriller, with the distinctly backhanded billing "The most electrifying tale of future shock since *Escape from New York!*"), so a couple of words of introduction may be useful. A very odd choice for Hollywood, *The Penal Colony* is a downbeat, rather unexciting thriller set in 1997 about a secret prison island maintained by the Home Office, which dumps lifers to fend for themselves in a kind of *Lord of the Flies* meets *The Prisoner*. In practice, the population splits into a minority cooperative group who build their own rough community in "The Village" (sic), and a majority of survivalist hard men ("outsiders") who roam the rest of the island as bandits. There are plotlines about the Villagers' plans for a seemingly impossible escape and the outsiders' plans to storm the Village, but the novel's clearly more interested in the social and political implications of its penological thought-experiment, which it explores in a refreshingly tough-minded way, if not an especially gripping one.

Well, it's hard to see exactly what recommended this dour, peculiarly British potboiler to Gale Anne Hurd, all-time rodeo queen of the sf action indie, and harder yet to see what kind of a movie she thought she wanted to make from it – especially as the novel is barely recognizable at all in the finished movie, on which the Hollywoodizing process has evidently worked double overtime. Setting and cast have been drastically internationalized: the island (which began its fictional life 40 miles off the north

Cornish coast) transplanted to the unspecified tropics, and the characters (who in the novel boasted resolutely public-school handles like Routledge, Appleton, Martinson) baptized anew in the waters of global brotherhood with new, manlier names forbidden to exceed two syllables, and accents harvested from the character actors of three continents. The British Home Office is replaced by yet another of those scheming multinationals whose privatization of the entire global future is such a familiar hazard of sf movie prologues ("In the year 2022, the international prison system is owned by private corporations," &c.), and the date catapulted 25 years further up the line the better to make room in the early scenes for some old-fashioned futuristic sets, shootups, and model work (including a dodgy maglev monorail straight out of *Fireball XL5*). The storyline's been bulked out with rather ineptly-inserted action episodes, the Village has become an expensive Crusoesque theme park of creepers and cane, and the Outsiders a comicsy confraternity of designer goons and savages.

Whatever the cinematic gains from all this, one unhappy consequence is to strip the original scenario of any real political sting, by detaching the story's world from any immediately recognizable reality. One of the key moral twists in the novel, for example, was that the humane, charismatic Village headman was also a Sinn Fein member and convicted Republican terrorist. But in the film, the Lance Henriksen character's crime is merely a rather ill-explained domestic murder, of which he doesn't actually seem even to be guilty. More centrally, *The Penal Colony*'s hero was an innocent middle-class commuter fitted up as a rapist by fabricated police evidence; Ray Liotta's screen version is a former commando banged up for blowing away his commanding officer in revenge for ordering an atrocity during the US presence in Libya in 2011. (And what was the US actually doing in Libya in 2011? – this apparently is not in our interest to know.) Presumably this was felt to make the conviction

seem more, rather than less, of a raging political injustice. But it just doesn't work like that. An old-fashioned stitchup is far more sinister than some invented fluff about military conspiracies in hypothetical future wars. Liotta's motivation – and let's not forget we're talking about a professional killer whom we actually see blowing his victim's head off is driven by the assumption he can simply escape, blow the whistle, and rest assured that public outrage will automatically ensure full servings of truth and justice all round. But in the novel, the completely innocent hero has to come to terms with the fact that even if he breaks out – especially if he breaks out – he will never stand a chance of clearing his name, and the very best he can hope for is a new identity on the far side of the world.

A central problem here with future prison movies as a genre is that human-rights issues derive most of their emotional and narrative power in the first place from their true-story, real-world status. Once displaced into an imaginary, meaningless future, the prison movie can witter on all it likes about personal redemption and the survival of human dignity, but there's no way on earth that an audience who've spent much of the spring of 1994 soaking up images of East Timor, apartheid, and the holocaust are going to get terribly outraged about the violation of rights involved in dropping Ray Liotta in a gorgeous basin of Queensland rainforest for a two-hour bout of stunt antics with Stuart Wilson (whose ranking as earth's finest movie villain is seriously let down here by his unhappy emulation of an American accent) and his facepainted, haircutted ruffians. It doesn't help that there are central discomforts of male prison life, about which the novel was nothing if not upfront, that can't readily be handled in popular American cinema; even when the insufferable Kevin Dillon character is captured for the pleasure of Wilson's leering savages ("A sweet, tender, adorable little boy! Tie him up – and I don't want him bruised!"), it turns out all they want to do is torture him to death in a preposterously elaborate apparatus the



details of whose sadistic workings escaped me entirely.

And yet, the odd thing is that, despite what must be the most systematic Hollywood makeover yet sustained by a British sf novel, *No Escape* remains one of the most British sf movies in years in both personnel and flavour. Aside from Liotta, Henriksen, and a couple of supports, practically all of the cast and crew are British or antipodean – including director Martin Campbell, whose career as a jobbing Hollywood Britpacker has been consistently interesting and just as consistently unrewarded since he migrated after *Edge of Darkness*: a couple of quality thrillers (*Criminal Law*, *Defenseless*), some well-regarded TV work and, in his earlier film for Gale Anne, one genuine original (the cable movie *Cast a Deadly Spell*, an *Unknown*-style period fantasy starring Fred Ward and Yog-Sothoth in what can only be described as a Lovecraftian *Roger Rabbit*). For all the palimpsesting of its actual source, *No Escape* still doesn't really feel like the product of a Hollywood sensibility at all; the structure and pacing break all the rules of standard studio form, at least some of them intentionally. The spectacle is mainly concentrated in the opening half-hour, after which the action is mostly bound to a single location and set; bouts of action become sporadic and widely-spaced; plotlines (includ-

ing the novel's) disappear into dead ends. Some of this is undoubtedly the fault of the script, which is simply a shapeless mess of illogic, anticlimax, and desperate narrative incoherence. (Am I missing something, or is it normal to find Dusty Springfield records and full club sound systems washed up on Polynesian beaches?) But *No Escape* does seem genuinely anxious to resist the easy option of an undiluted action-adventure, in favour of an unfashionably thoughtful, humane, and slow-moving portrait of a complex experiment in human nature, with a large cast of developed characters and a very novelistic interest in the texture and detail of its imagined world. But in doing so it gambles a lot on the power of its human themes, and frankly there's just not enough there to carry a film of this length. If you liked *Slipstream*, or (to be marginally more charitable) Altman's *Quintet*, you're in for a real treat. Hello? hello? operator?

And so we blink back tears as we honour accidental local hero II. Inexpensive British sf writers don't come much more so than the irresistible Harry Adam Knight, surely the most deliciously unlikely fount of movie inspiration in our national memory. Out of the host of new talent to emerge from this soil in the 80s, only Harry Adam's daft splatter romps have been touched with the blessed gift of

movie life not once but twice: first, and rather after-a-fashion, in Corman's *Carnosaur*, and now in the encore performance of last year's saviour of the British film industry, Vadim Jean's **Beyond Bedlam**. And if *No Escape* is solemn, free with its source, and ultimately rather feeble, **Beyond Bedlam** is lurid, amazingly and quite needlessly faithful to Harry Adam's more humbly-titled *Bedlam* (I trust Wyman Guin's estate will consider suing for credit), and ultimately quite tragically dire in ways that only a truly enthusiastic British horror movie is capable of being. That it found itself released in David Alton Week, and thus (by being instantly refused video certification) catapulted into the improbable position of prime martyr to the new thought-fascism, is just another layer of ironic icing on an already heavily-marzipanned cake.

For Harry Adam Knight, as IZ readers will be well aware, is a joke author, the acronymous fabrication and sink for the surplus talents of mild-mannered community members John Brosnan and Leroy Kettle. That Harry Adam's career has taken off in a modest but still rather alarming way is presumably down to the novels' generous lashings of tongue-bursting-gorily-through-cheek inventiveness, which is clearly the quality that's appealed to Jean and his team – so much so that there's almost nothing in the film

version that isn't already in the book, even down to quite minor details of character and setting, and touches of plotting that were a bit wonky even with pages of optimistic rationalization to shore them up. Such fidelity is, in this case sorely misplaced. Film magnifies absurdity: what in a low-budget paperback can be happily assimilated as merely amiable tosh rapidly becomes utter drivel when blown up unaltered on the big screen, especially in a movie as overdressed as this. For where the novel's characters and setting were studiously drab and everyday, *Beyond Bedlam* is one of those movies where even the most proletarian live in designer apartments with gothically inadequate lighting and (to judge from Elizabeth Hurley's extreme recourse to skimpy satin nighties) even less adequate airconditioning; where cutting-edge neuroscientists work in enormous shadowy labs with bunsen burners and test tubes (honest); and where the Home Office bangs up its serial psychos in huge dramatically-lit cages with heavy hydraulically-operated guillotine bars (as well, apparently, as several giant washing machines full of blood, whose research purpose eluded me).

It's also, sadly, one of those movies where people say "How long has it been now?" in Act I, "I can't believe this is happening" in II, and "It's over, Stephanie" after each false ending before the psycho comes CRASHING BACK from the presumed dead. It's mesmerizingly badly-acted (especially by la Hurley, who really doesn't seem to be entering into the spirit at all), grotesquely overdesigned and overdirected, and full of elementary cinematic mistakes that suggest Jean was not the more gifted half of the Leon the Pig Farmer team. (It's a long list, but eg: when the heroine is forced to step off a rooftop it's more usual to include at least one shot each of (i) the view of the drop (ii) the actual moment where she goes over the edge.) It's a sad indictment that there's nothing good about *Beyond Bedlam* that wasn't already there in Harry Adam's cheap' n'cheeky little shocker, and much of the best stuff from the novel (like the ending, all the gory throwaways, and the whole uplifting vision of Harrow-on-the Hill visited with long-overdue armageddon) has actually been dropped. You'd have to be on something pretty heavy to claim that either of these novels was among the landmarks of British sf in the last decade, but what's become of both on screen is something you really wouldn't wish on Piers Anthony; and as the blue moon sinks again in a bed of mist, across the land the shadows twitch with apotropaic gestures.

(Nick Lowe)

Interaction

Continued from page 5

the stories stand alone. For example, I could have sworn that "Pilgrim 7" (Stephen Baxter) was illustrated – but it was the high visual clarity of the author's descriptions that I remembered. While on the subject of Baxter, I should mention that on a first run-through of the year's magazines his stories "Pilgrim 7," "No Longer Touch the Earth" and "Lieserl" were the only stories that I picked out as "particularly good." I wasn't aware that I'd become a fan of his – his earlier work in *IZ*, his novel *Raft*, and even his other two stories from this year's sample didn't impress me nearly as much. Mr Baxter seems to have made some sort of transition to the world of mature writing, one which justifies the long years of support by your magazine. – P.J.L. Hinder, Bristol.

Which artist's illustrations did I particularly like? Issue 70, Jim Burns, for "No Better Than Anyone Else" by Molly Brown. I can take or leave the artwork in a magazine I buy specifically for its fiction, but I do remember thinking how perfectly these complemented the story. The best of the non-fiction is, for me, the book reviews and I read them enthusiastically. Although I enjoy those by John Clute – mainly for the fun of trying to get through them without once having recourse to a thesaurus or dictionary – the reviewer on whom I tend to rely is Paul J. McAuley. Without his good opinion, I wouldn't have considered Paul Park's three linked *Soldiers of Paradise* novels ("Oh no, not another bloody boring fantasy trilogy!") and would have missed what turned out to be one of the most absorbing and glorious reads of 1993. Chris Gilmore is an absolute delight: someone who clearly loves language for itself and not just for what, with varying degrees of conviction or success, other people make of it. He's the sort of person one can imagine choosing a clean and honourable death if the only other option is to read the collected works of Jeffrey Archer with loud and frequent signs of admiration and enjoyment. That said, he can make a book seem absolutely irresistible even when he's taking issue with the writer's competence. – Anne Acaster, Maidstone.

Five stars, as usual, to the "terrible alien eye" that looks over earthlings' artistic efforts called movies (the fabulous Nick Lowe), and to the "Interaction" section: the battle of words about Aldiss's provocative and, in my opinion, excellent story "Horse Meat" was one of the big events of the year and a good example of the vitality of the magazine and its readers – please

keep challenging our minds and guts! Other good non-fiction moments were Kim Stanley Robinson's, Ian Watson's and future classic Greg Egan's interviews, and also the annotated author bibliographies (always welcomed). – Pedro Miguel Rocha Pires, Lisbon.

Best story was Greg Egan's "Chaff." This is very much my taste in fiction: exciting, interesting, believable science fiction and above all a truly novel story at a time when so much clone material is published. Special nominations for the funniest story: "Norbert and the System" by Timons Esaias and "An Occupational Disease" by Julian Flood. There really should be a separate vote for humorous stories – how about it for next year? Best non-fiction award goes to Brian Stableford for his "Yesterday's Bestsellers" series; very interesting indeed, well worth the space. – Andrew Munley, Kilwinning, Scotland.

I liked Harrison & Ings, Stephen Blanchard, Ian Lee, Astrid Julian, Lawrence Dyer, Terry Bisson, Paul Di Filippo, Josef Nesvadba and others. But I'm surprised to find I've listed so many stories as being enjoyable, as my overall impression of the fiction in *IZ* over the last year or more is that it has become increasingly lacklustre, with too much space being given to merely professional work (Newman, Baxter, Egan) rather than to anything challenging, radical or different – or even particularly enjoyable. Newman's intertextuality, recursiveness, whatever, has become as tedious as Eric Brown's continual retelling of the same story. – Mark Bould, Plymouth.

Having finished my first calendar year of reading *Interzone*, I'm pleased I finally got around to it. Reading British books in Australia with *IZ* ads in the back had me hungry for the magazine when I got here, and I'm sure I'll be taking back a subscription with me when I eventually go... All the non-fiction elements are well worth their existence. They have instilled in me a much better sense of being part of a community of readers and writers. Having previously read *Analog* for about a year, I only got a concept of a "fandom" which seemed a little mindless and divorced from those who actually produce the material. – Duncan Lawie, London.

Most of your star discoveries seem to have defected to Asimov's SF Magazine or got caught up in novel writing. (You exaggerate: Ben Jeapes tells us that he recently sold a story to Asimov's, but that doesn't stop him from writing for *IZ*, just as it hasn't stopped Greg Egan and many others – Ed.) Is

Concluded on page 45

Vain

Peter Friend & Li Cross

Daddy's locked himself in the nursery. He's home early – perhaps he's been fired again.

I stand on tiptoes and look in through the little window in the nursery door. Lots of new things in there – benches, medical stuff, and a funny glass box with "Bobby" scrawled on the front. A small golden shape with huge dark eyes lies inside, looking back at me. I smile and wave at Bobby; his eyes flicker but he doesn't move. Daddy turns some equipment off and leaves, locking the door behind him.

"Can I play with him, Daddy?"

From down the hall, Mummy overhears me, and laughs like breaking glass. She's in one of her moods.

"Hear that?" she mocks. "The brat wants to play with it."

Daddy ignores her. "No, Rachel. Bobby's very sick. We have to keep him in the nursery by himself."

"We might give each other nasty germs or a virus," I suggest, trying my best to sound grown up. I read all about germs and viruses last week in the encyclopedia. Daddy likes it when I learn things. Usually.

But this time he closes his eyes and stands very still for a few seconds. I tense, ready to run. He breathes deeply and checks the locked nursery door.

"Yes," he says quietly, and walks away. I hear the study door close, then violin music on the stereo. Violins are OK – Daddy must be sad, but at least I won't have to hide.

No-one speaks during dinner.

Afterwards, I go to my room and read *Tik Tok of Oz* until midnight. It's nearly ten o'clock when I wake up the next morning.

I walk barefoot through the house, checking the empty rooms as I go. Bobby is asleep in the still-locked nursery. I tap gently on the door, but he doesn't wake up.

No-one else is home, except Ching-Wei in the kitchen, glumly polishing silver cutlery. She looks at me disapprovingly.

"Where are they?" I ask.

"Your father at lab. Your mother out some place with pretty men from yacht club," she snorts in disgust. "You should be at school."

"I don't go to school," I reply proudly. "Not since we lived in Singapore. They forgot to enrol me. I waited for them to remember, but they've never even noticed." I snort in disgust, copying Ching-Wei the best I can.

She glares at me. "Bad parents. And you bad girl.

Grow up like your mother for sure. God help you," she says sadly, crossing herself.

I run down the hall, stamping my feet loudly. Stupid old housekeeper, what does she know? I don't need school, I'm smart already. When I grow up, I'm going to be a famous doctor like Daddy.

I run into the breakfast room, grab a newspaper from the table and fling it into the air, scattering the pages all over the room and jumping on them. One of the pages has a big circle in blue ink around a photo of Daddy's lab. I stop, and carefully collect all the pages, putting them in order, sitting on them to flatten them and smooth out the crumples. Daddy always keeps newspaper stories about himself. I don't want to make him angry.

I try to read the story in the blue circle, but some of the words are too hard. The headline says: "Killer Virus on Loose?" Daddy's name is there, six times, once with all the capital letters after it to show how smart he is. One of the photos shows walls splashed with red paint, and one shows policemen with big shields and sticks, and angry people holding signs. The signs are mostly in Chinese, so I can't tell why the people are angry. Some signs have "DNA" written on them. Daddy talks about DNA sometimes, and it was in the encyclopedia too, but I couldn't understand that part. Maybe the people are angry because Daddy knows more about DNA than they do. Daddy says people are always jealous of how smart he is. Maybe that's why we have to move all the time.

Footsteps echo down the hall. Frightened, I sneak a quick look, but it's only Ching-Wei, carrying a basket to the nursery. I run after her.

"Are you going to feed Bobby?"

"Poor creature," she mutters. "Need hospital. Need real doctor, not your father. Need his mother, not me. Not my job change nappies, warm bottles. Seven children I bring up, enough for anyone."

"I'll feed him," I suggest. She ignores me and starts unlocking the nursery door.

"In pain, I sure of it, look at him. Should be put out of misery. But all in God's time. If God want Bobby to live, I care for him, no thanks to doctor and family."

"I'll help. Daddy said I could," I insist.

She turns on me crossly. "Do not lie to me, little missy. I not your parents. I know you." She slams the nursery door shut behind her, and locks it.

I watch her through the window. She isn't very kind to Bobby. She doesn't hug or kiss him even once, and only touches him with big plastic gloves. She

wears a surgical mask the whole time. I'm glad she's not my mother. No I'm not, she's nicer than Mummy.

When she leaves the nursery, I'm sitting on the staircase, pretending to read a book. She stares at me for a second, goes into the study and closes the door. I hear the filing cabinet open and close – it's the bottom drawer, I know because it squeaks differently to the others. A soft thud – the middle desk drawer as she puts the filing-cabinet keys back in their special hiding place, the one I found months ago. I know all the hiding places in this house. And every house we've ever lived in.

After lunch, Ching-Wei always goes shopping at the vegetable market. By the time the back door closes, I've already got the nursery key, and everything else I'll need. I've had a shower and scrubbed myself extra well, so I've got no germs. I've made a surgical mask out of a hanky and some string, and I'm wearing my best gloves, the long pink ones with the little pearl buttons. In the mirror, I look just like a real doctor.

Bobby's sitting up in his glass box when I come in.

"Hello, Bobby," I say, "I'm Doctor Rachel. Would you like to play with me?"

He looks up. He doesn't smile at all, but he raises his arms towards me. I put out my arms too, and we have a big hug. I lift him out of the box, and down onto the floor. He's heavier than I expected. His skin is soft, and smells faintly of cinnamon. His hair is fine gold, so much prettier than my mousy brown curls. He's beautiful. I wish I had a little brother.

When we first moved here, Mummy thought she'd like to have another baby. They spent lots of money decorating this room before she changed her mind. But now it makes a good room for Bobby. There are pretty pictures of jungles and nice wild animals on the walls, and the wardrobes are still full of baby clothes and toys.

I search through them for something for Bobby, but the clothes don't fit very well – he's too small and his arms are too long, and he squirms when I try to put booties on his feet. He's not very good with toys either. He tries several times to pick up a big green ball but his arms twitch too much. He squeals sadly and flops onto his side.

I've forgotten about Ching-Wei, until I suddenly hear the back door. Luckily, she goes straight to the kitchen, and I have plenty of time to pack the clothes and toys away. I give Bobby a kiss, through my mask so I won't give him germs.

"Goodbye," I whisper. "Don't feel lonely. I'll be back tomorrow."

Every day I watch through the window whenever Ching-Wei feeds or changes him. Every afternoon I play with him, except when Mummy or Daddy are at home, which isn't often. Every evening I watch through the window when Daddy sticks little wires to Bobby and makes long wiggly lines on the computer screens. I keep hoping Bobby will get better, but he doesn't. He sleeps more and more, and sometimes I have to help him to even sit up.

"Bobby's going to die, isn't he?" I ask Daddy as he leaves the nursery, one evening when Bobby hardly moves.

"Yes, damn it," Daddy shouts, and raises his fist. I crouch down on the floor but he just punches the wall. "And it's all my fault. That's what your bitch mother's been telling you, isn't it?" he yells.

"No," I say, trying not to cry, but he's not listening, not even looking at me.

"Biggest breakthrough for anyone in five years," he shouts. "Nobel Prize, that's what it deserves. But no, all anyone cares about is the damned chimp."

He kicks the nursery door. I run past him. He doesn't chase me, perhaps doesn't even notice me.

I run to my best hiding place, the linen cupboard at the top of the stairs, and close the door. Careful not to disturb the neatly stacked sheets and towels, I crawl to the back and curl up under an old grey blanket.

I can still hear him shouting. "It worked, it worked perfectly. Just look at him, a regular Marilyn Monroe. Cretins, all of them."

The study door slams and opera music blares out, shuddering along the hallway.

As he gets drunk, he starts to sing along to the opera, very loudly and badly. He stumbles around the house, swearing, knocking furniture over, sometimes calling my name in an ugly voice. Mummy arrives home, drunk as well, and they shout at each other. He calls her a slut and a whore. She calls him a genius and laughs at him. They hit each other. I hold my hands over my ears and pray to Ching-Wei's God to kill them both.

In the morning, there is silence.

Daddy's in the breakfast room, drinking pine-apple juice and reading the newspaper. Three jagged scratches twist across his face, and there's a small bandage on the back of his left hand.

"Morning, Rachel," he says pleasantly, and continues reading. Perhaps he doesn't remember last night. I can never tell.

As I walk down the hallway, I meet Mummy coming the other way. She's limping slightly and has a black eye. As I pass, she punches me on the side of the head, once, hard, and walks on without saying a word. I sit on the floor, gasping silently in pain. I don't cry. I won't cry.

Ching-Wei half-carries me to the kitchen, and hugs me until I can breathe without shaking. She whispers to herself in Chinese, over and over again, and stares out the window into the garden.

"This a evil house," she says suddenly, looking down at me. "I leave, but then what they do to you?"

I look into her eyes, and she shivers.

Outside, male voices, Mummy's forced laughter, a slamming car door and the roar of an expensive engine.

"She gone, maybe whole day. Your father in nice mood this morning. You be okay for now."

"For now," I echo, and walk down the hall.

Daddy's standing in the study doorway, flicking through a pile of papers, and humming Mozart. He sees me and waves cheerfully.

"China, Rachel!"

"Yes," I say, forcing myself to smile. I have no idea what he means.

"The Tiensin Institute are desperate to get their hands on my allele pattern matching work. Or then there's Japan – Haiko Pharmaceuticals would love to

know how I solved the protein degeneration problem. How would you like to live in Japan? We've never been there, have we? We don't need these idiots here. Bureaucrats whining about official testing procedures and animal rights loonies jumping up and down every time I try something."

Moving. Again. He'll be happy for the next month, deciding where to go, arguing over the phone about how many research assistants he can have or the size of his office. We'll move to another city, he'll resign or be fired, and it will all start over again. I don't think we've ever stayed in one place for more than a year.

I know sometimes we all haven't... got on too well. But you'll see, Rachel, it'll be a new start for us all. This time everything will work out just fine. I promise." He means it. But he meant it the last time, too.

"What about Bobby?" I ask, then wish I hadn't. But he doesn't look angry, just very serious.

"We can't do anything to help him now, Rachel. His whole nervous system is breaking down. He's not in any pain. I've always treated my lab animals well, always, you know that."

I nod, clenching my fists behind my back.

"Those short-sighted Luddites at the lab wanted me to put him down – they don't even know he's here. He's taught me an incredible amount over the last weeks. The experiment was a great success, whatever they think."

"Did you give him a virus you made?" I ask hesitantly. A dangerous question, but I need to know. He laughs and I relax.

"No, no, it's not a virus, not really. Don't believe that trash in the newspapers, Rachel. What I developed is a viral recomposition enzyme." He speaks the words slowly and carefully, as if they're a magic spell or a curse.

"But perhaps I should give it a different name. Say 'viral' to a reporter and they think 'AIDS', say 'enzyme' and they think 'washing powder'. Idiots, all of them. You know how a virus works, right?"

"Yes," I say, lying.

"Well, my enzyme sneaks into a cell like a virus does, sure, that's the 'viral' part. When it's inside, it unravels some of the cell's DNA and repositions a few pieces. And then it leaves and goes on to the next cell. Nothing is destroyed, just rearranged slightly." He beams at me, proud of himself.

I nod and smile, understanding nothing. "Why did it make Bobby blonde?"

"That's how we pay the bills," he chuckles. "That's how we get the corporate sponsorship. Imagine it, I said to them. Five years from now, walk into a chemist and buy a bottle of pills. Take three a day, and six weeks later you're blonde. Genuinely blonde. Your DNA harmlessly altered. Permanently. How many people would pay a few hundred dollars for that, eh? Millions, tens of millions. And that's just hair colour, kids' stuff, no more than a demonstration. Then we get more funding and move on to the practical research. In ten years, we could be eliminating Down's Syndrome, cystic fibrosis, hemophilia, hundreds of things. Disarm viruses maybe – no more AIDS, no more common cold. And then we've fully decoded human DNA..." He sighs happily.

"It almost went perfectly, you know. The enzyme worked-exactly as we programmed it. Unfortunately

we made it rearrange a few more codons than it should have – accidentally told nerve connections to stop regenerating. Quite unexpected. But that's what experiments are for, isn't it? I'll have it working without any side effects within a year, I'm sure."

I go upstairs to the library, pull out volume five of the encyclopedia, and try to read the pages on DNA. There are pictures of long twisty chains of coloured balls, and photos of the insides of cells. "Humans and tomatoes both have 23 pairs of chromosomes," it says under one picture. Whatever that means. There's a photo of a chimpanzee, an ordinary one, not pretty blonde like Bobby. "Ninety-eight percent of human and chimpanzee DNA is identical," it says underneath. None of it makes sense, even when I try checking some of the words in the big dictionary.

Everything I need to know is full of long words. Maybe I should go back to school.

Mummy arrives home just before dinner, cheerfully drunk. The meal is almost happy. Daddy tells us lots of stories about how stupid the other researchers are. They're not really very funny stories, but we all laugh anyway. Mummy laughs at nearly everything we say. Even when Daddy leaves the room to get another bottle of wine, she continues giggling.

"He's thinking of China next, you know," she says to me. "China! What the hell am I supposed to do in China? God, I hope he chooses Japan. And I hope we actually stay this time. I can't take this endless moving crap much longer. 'The most promising new name in research for years,' that's what some old farts called him at our wedding, did you know that? Promises, promises. 'You're so lucky,' everyone told me. In a few years we'll be rich and famous, I told myself. I actually loved him then. Ten years ago. Got the 'famous' part right, I suppose – every genetics lab on earth has heard of the prick."

She sighs, gulps another mouthful of wine, and smiles at me blearily. "I like what you've done with your hair," she says. "The new colour, it suits you."

I look at her blankly, and the smile slowly fades from her face. Her glass shatters wetly on the floor.

"You bastard," she screams into the night. "You inhuman bastard! What have you done to my daughter? How could you?"

Bobby and I live at the hospital now. We have a big white room all to ourselves, with a view of the ocean. Ching-Wei visited us this morning. She told us the whole house has been sealed off with huge sheets of plastic. She told us they've all been tested, and that none of them caught it off us. I told her I was glad, because I wouldn't want her to die. She started crying, and had to leave.

The doctors say Bobby will live only a few more weeks. They keep asking questions about Daddy and me, and I keep telling them it's not his fault.

Mostly we sleep. Sometimes I read to Bobby, but already I'm having trouble turning the pages. My whole body feels numb, and I'm always tired. But Daddy was right – there's no pain, no pain at all. Sometimes we watch television or just sit and look out the window. Our hair is beautiful.

In Search of Science Fiction

Charles Platt



1. The Blackened Hills

Forty miles south of Los Angeles, Laguna Beach is a prosperous, fashionable little town where million-dollar homes used to nestle amid lush foliage on hillsides overlooking the ocean. I say "used to," because last year a brush fire incinerated more than 300 of the wood-frame houses, causing damage estimated at more than half a billion dollars. Today, many of the hillsides are scorched and bare.

Physicist/writer Gregory Benford lives here. His house was spared; his neighbours were not so lucky. He drives me further up into the hills, where buildings, trees, bushes, and grass have been completely burned away. It's a rainy day, and the barren earth glistens like black volcanic rock. As we follow the winding road, I see empty rectangles of concrete: foundations where houses once stood.

We get out of the car, and I walk onto one of the concrete islands. There are vinyl-asbestos floor tiles underfoot, and I realize I'm standing in an area that used to be a kitchen. Here, less than a year ago, children played, meals were cooked, and people sat and talked and watched TV, unaware of the catastrophe that would disrupt their comfortable lives.

Laguna Beach is like a page from a British disaster novel. I used to read a lot of those novels, wondering how it would feel to live in a world where civilization had collapsed.

Now I know that the reality is almost exactly the way I imagined it. The blackened hillsides are melancholy in their lifelessness; yet there's a grandeur about the destruction which I find strangely seductive.

2. The Laboratory

Sixty miles north-east of Laguna Beach, the great grey bulk of the San Gabriel Mountains looms above a flat valley where orange groves are being cleared to make way for tract homes and mini-malls.

At an intersection marked by a post-modern City Hall, a curving street leads into an industrial park. Boxy, single-story buildings with tinted-glass facades are spaced well apart,

screened by bushes and ivy. Lawn sprinklers cast rainbows in the California sun.

Inside one of these buildings is a comfortable waiting area, a couple of small offices, a conference room — and a large laboratory. Here, amid \$300,000 worth of modern medical equipment, a man named Jerry White is undergoing an unusual operation.

A surgeon opens White's chest and attaches cannulae to the major blood vessels leading from his heart. A solution of glycerol is flowed into his circulatory system. During the next four hours, the concentration is gradually ramped up, till the solution has displaced much of the water in White's body. The objective is to protect him from damage when he is subsequently frozen.

By contemporary medical standards, Jerry White is dead. But ever since CPR was invented in the 1950s, "death" has become increasingly hard to define. Today, many emergency rooms are equipped with drugs (such as calcium channel blockers) and equipment (such as blood oxygenators) which can save patients who have no heartbeat, no respiration, and no brain activity. In accidents where the patient has been chilled — perhaps by immersion in snow drifts or cold water — resuscitation has been possible after literally hours without any detectable signs of life. Thus it's fair to say that death is no longer fatal, so long as the delicate chemistry of brain cells isn't allowed to deteriorate to the point of no return. Generally speaking, if brain function can be restored, life can be restored.

In Jerry White's case, a lot of effort has been expended to preserve his brain. When his vital signs ceased after a long battle with cancer, a medical team was standing by. They injected him with anticoagulants, antioxidants, and other drugs, and they used CPR to maintain his heartbeat and respiration while he was cooled in an ice bath to reduce his metabolic rate. His blood was then replaced with an organ preservation solution, he was enclosed in a specially constructed container filled with bags of ice, and he was flown to the laboratory here in

the valley where orange trees once grew.

In theory, at least, his personality and intelligence still exist as a function of his preserved brain structure and chemistry. Therefore, at some time in the future, it's conceivable that advanced medical science will be able to cure his condition and revive him.

Of course, this is wildly speculative. Even with the use of glycerol as a cryoprotectant, White will suffer freezing damage which must be repaired before he can live. Maybe a century from now, nanotechnology will be able to tackle that task, cell by cell; but a new body will also have to be cloned for him, because here in the laboratory, his head is the only part of him that is going to be preserved. Jerry White lacked the financial resources to pay for long-term storage of his whole body, and so, now, his head is separated from his body and placed in a cryogenic freezer.

I'm well acquainted with the people pursuing this bizarre, ghoulish, (insert your epithet here) endeavour. I met White a year ago when he and I appeared on a talk show promoting cryonics. Now I'm in this laboratory, helping to shift his head (discreetly wrapped, and enclosed in a stainless-steel pail) from the freezer into a massive tank where his temperature will be reduced further, to -196 degrees Centigrade.

The lid of the tank is removed, and white vapour billows down. Jerry White's head is suspended inside the tank, and the lid is replaced. Temperature readings are displayed on a screen, chronicling his slow descent to the temperature of liquid nitrogen.

Yes, this is a bizarre scenario. But in my teenaged years, when I spent so many hours reading science fiction and taking it extremely seriously, I always assumed that the future would be a strange place. I would have been disappointed by anything less.

Cryonics may be merely an exercise in wishful thinking; but that's a plausibility issue which doesn't concern me here. My point is simply that in this laboratory, as on the hillsides of Laguna Beach, we find science fiction transliterated into the everyday world.

3. The Atlantis Project

After driving on the freeway for a little over three hours, I take an exit at the southern edge of Las Vegas. I find myself in a suburban development that's so recent, the roads have not yet been paved. Here, in a spacious five-bedroom house, a small band of political idealists is pursuing a billion-dollar fantasy.

Their goal is to construct a floating city off the coast of Panama. This, they hope, will be an independent country which will be run as a libertarian utopia.

They call their endeavour the Atlantis Project. Its founder is Eric Klien, a slightly shy, somewhat nerdy one-time computer programmer who made a lot of money in the stock market and "retired" before the age of 25. For a few months, in 1992, Klien lay around playing video games while his money made more money. Then he decided he should do something more useful, so he sponsored a local political candidate during the U.S. presidential election. His candidate lost, which was no great surprise. Then Klien discovered there had been blatant vote fraud.

With the help of a private investigator, he determined that literally thousands of absentee ballots had been cast by people who turned out to be dead. Meanwhile, ballots for the losing candidates had been systematically damaged to invalidate them. The local newspaper picked up the story, and yet, inexplicably, the FBI refused to act.

Klien decided that legitimate political protest was no longer possible in the United States. Therefore, he wished to live elsewhere. Only one problem: the alternatives were unappealing.

So why not start a country of his own?

Within six months, largely by circulating his proposal via the Internet, Klien managed to raise around \$100,000 in donations. Some of this has been spent on construction of a scale model designed by a Scandinavian architect who previously created a floating hotel that was moored off the coast of Australia and has now been relocated in Saigon harbour.

As I explore Klien's house, I find a printing press in the garage, a photolithography plate-making machine in the dining room, cluttered bookshelves, computers on old steel desks, and huge stacks of promotional literature dumped haphazardly on the dusty wall-to-wall carpet. Various dogs and hairy people are wandering around. Mailings are being sent out. Volunteer workers are talking on telephones.

Klien takes a few minutes to show me a television commercial that he's been airing locally, depicting everyday citizens who are fed up with big

government and are eager for a new land where people can be truly free.

Will it work? Again, my purpose here is not to debate plausibility. I'm just interested in the way that another science-fictional concept has slipped out of the literature, into the everyday world.

4. The Glass Pyramid

On the Las Vegas Strip, a bizarre new structure stands amid the casinos. It's a featureless black pyramid nearly 400 feet high, unlit except at the apex, where a battery of searing white searchlights blasts a vertical column of light into the night sky.

The pyramid is a hotel; there are rooms hidden behind the slanting black glass. Inside, the structure is hollow. It's a huge, four-faceted shell 30 storeys high, with walls just one room thick. The land area that it encompasses would hold a couple of football fields with room to spare.

The area has been actively developed, cluttered with incongruous tourist attractions. At the centre, a hundred-foot obelisk emits green laser beams. Nearby, a "futuristic" eatery named the Millennium Cafe offers "chrono burgers" and "quasar quenchers." There's a moat around the perimeter, where you can go for a guided tour on a boat, and visitors wander among scale replicas of New York skyscrapers that contain gift shops, a video-game arcade, and a movie theatre.

There's also a Disneyland-style ride: a flight simulator seating 13 people. The floor jerks and tilts, reinforcing the illusion of motion created by a wide-screen movie in front of the audience. This movie is almost entirely computer-generated: a swooping journey through a synthetic landscape.

Virtual reality, here, is layered. The fake world of the flight simulator is enclosed by the artificial environment of the pyramid, which is embedded in the neon fantasy of Las Vegas itself.

In Search of Science Fiction

In the 1990s, the potential readership for science fiction seems to be divided into two groups, one seeking scenarios that seem real enough to live in, the other preferring imaginary realms that grossly violate the rules of reality.

Twenty years ago, the first group of readers was dominant, and I was one of them, looking for extrapolative fiction which would withstand sceptical examination. Today, I find myself vastly outnumbered. Fantasy (and fantasy-flavoured science fiction) fills the shelves. When I search for plausible world-building, I find maybe six books a year that are written with my needs in mind.

The lack of rational reading material doesn't bother me as much as it used to, because there is now an alternative. I can turn around, walk out of the

bookstore, and find science fiction in the contemporary landscape.

I take pleasure in this. After all, my original purpose as a science-fiction reader was to find alternate worlds that I could imagine living in.

The four scenarios that I've described above were sampled during a one-week, West Coast vacation. They may seem low-budget and limited compared with concepts such as spaceflight, or telepathy, or time travel. But they have one attribute that science fiction cannot match: they exist, here and now.

(Charles Platt)

Interaction

Continued from page 40

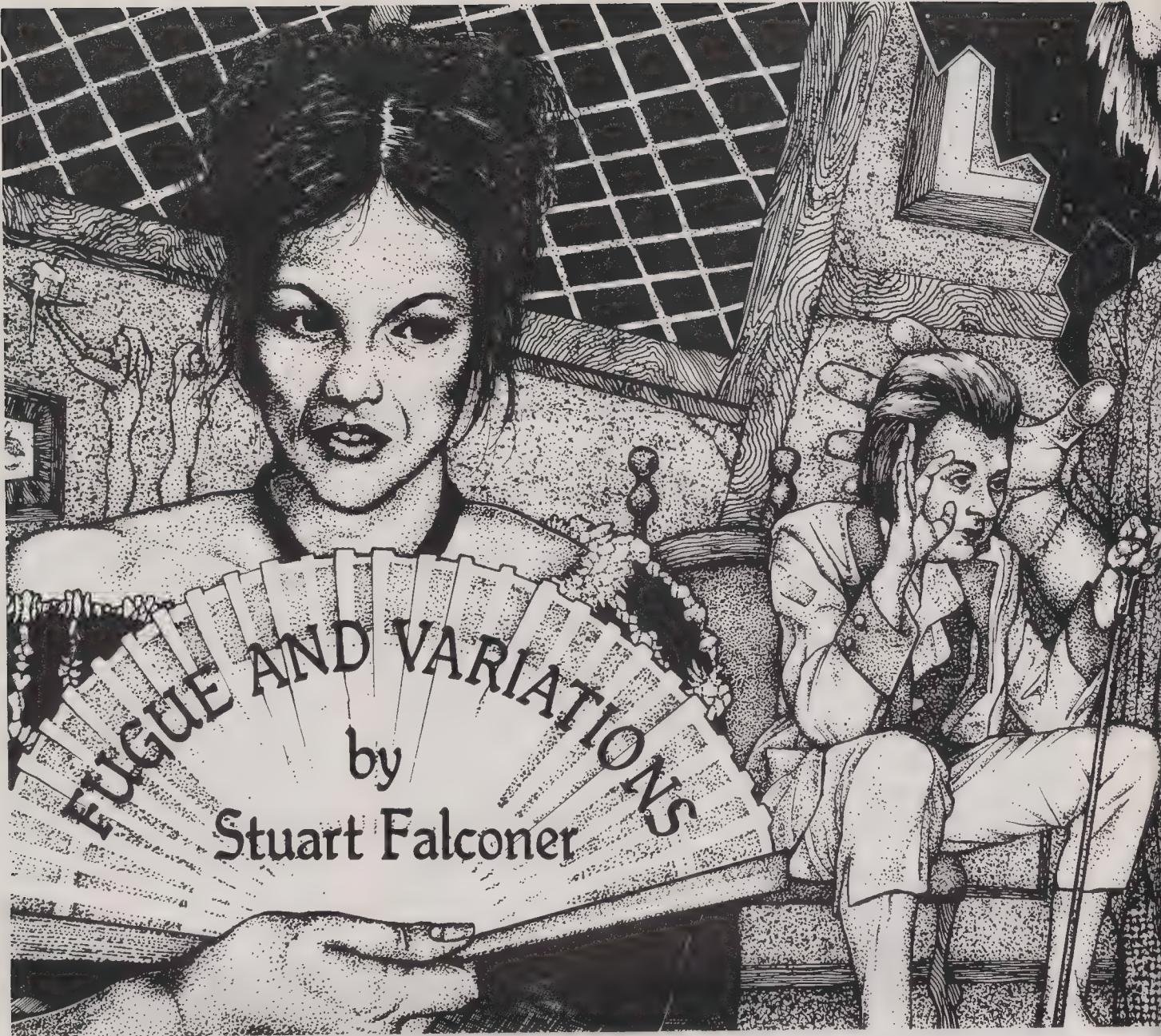
there enough fresh talent out there for another outstanding New Writers' issue to take *Interzone*, and British sf, into the late 1990s? (We're confident that there is – Ed.) — **Richard D. Smith, Sudbury, Suffolk.**

I do think you can be a bit cruel about publishing letters from people who should be allowed time for the yoghurt to clear from their skulls. I mean, S.T. Joshi ("Interaction," #77); poor guy, he must spend a fortune in crutches for his head and what does he get? Public ridicule. You're bad, heartless people.

— **Roddy Graham, Motherwell, Scotland.**

A point regarding the S.T. Joshi correspondence from issue 77... Quite frankly, I thoroughly agree with him. It's terribly easy to attack ugly truths, but Mr Joshi does deal with facts which no amount of moral righteousness can alter. — **Tom Evershed, Luton.**

Chris Beckett's "The Welfare Man" (August 1993) was especially welcome for its social comment, a somewhat underdeveloped theme in the magazine. Molly Brown is consistently turning out high-quality stories; her wit and strong sense of character make every one of her stories a delight. More please! Wendy Bradley's television column is missed by this reader; though there's probably insufficient material for a monthly column an occasional appearance would do no harm. What has been lacking on the non-fiction side is a comment columnist of the calibre of Charles Platt, who was able to stir opinion and debate. (He's back with us – Ed.) — **Andy Mills, Hull.**



The theatre was in almost total darkness. Bayreuth's immense stage was swathed in loose white cloth to signify an arctic terrain. The sound of the wind, conjured up by an undulating passage on the violins, added to the sense of desolation and remoteness. Here and there a pale light picked out snow-covered rocks.

Walton stood centre-stage, wearing a thick coat of furs. His leitmotiv took the form of a melancholy hunting call in minor thirds, played on two of the composer's own tubas. In his fine baritone he described as best he could the strange events he had witnessed.

Downstage and to the right in her own separately lit area stood his sister Margaret Saville, a soprano, reading his account from a letter. Her occasional exclamations of *My poor Robert!* or *Dear Robert, please take care!* were introduced by a gentle phrase on a flute.

Stage-left and well to the back, almost hidden behind a rock, the creature sat with its head in its hands. Corpse-pale and hideous, it peeped out through uneven fingers at a hostile world. Its sporadic

and incomprehensible cries were delivered in a seemingly bottomless basso-profoundo, preceded by the sepulchral tones of a bass clarinet and a double bassoon.

Lights flashed. A battery of percussion – thunder sheets, tympani and cymbals – echoed the lightning. There was a sound like the rattling of huge chains and the clatter of breaking glass. Somewhere, off-stage but none the less close, the mad scientist was still at work.

I opened my eyes. On the table in front of me the file was open at an entry taken from Mary Shelley's journal, written during the summer of 1816. One line in particular was highlighted. "Doctor Mozart is amusing and kind," she wrote, "But his tale haunts me still."

When my grandfather William Cookman died he left his collection of books to the university. He had spent at least half his professional life on the staff of the philosophy department, the last ten years as senior lecturer. I was asked, both as his grandson and as a member of the library staff, to prepare an inventory.



Over the years he had amassed a sizeable collection of old books, acquiring many of them by scouring second-hand bookshops. There were some rare items among them. Looking along the shelves I could see some titles which were almost legendary; others which normally appeared only as footnotes in more recent works.

Books fascinated him. As a small boy I remember accompanying him on one of his expeditions, helping him to rummage through the shelves of a favourite shop. At the time I thought it was an excellent game. Having only a hazy idea of what to choose, I went for the books with the most interesting covers. This seemed to amuse him. Where some adults might have given me a telling off for not looking at the titles or the authors, he told me I had grasped the trick of it at my first attempt.

"You will find, as you grow up," he said, examining the finely tooled leather binding of a book I had shown him, "That the outside is the only part some people bother with. I have seen collections of books with as much leather on them as a cavalry regiment,

but which remained untouched from one year to the next. That is sad, don't you think?" I thought so.

Years later, when I told him I intended training as a librarian, he greeted the news with enthusiasm. When I joined the staff at the university library he was delighted. From then on, whenever I visited my grandparents' house, he found an excuse to consult a book from his collection, which gave him an opportunity to share his love of books with a fellow devotee. In time his shelf-lined study, his inner sanctum, became almost as familiar to me as the stacks where I spent my working days.

A marginal entry in my grandfather's familiar, minute handwriting comments: "On the first day, God created Latin for perfection. On the second day, he created Greek for beauty. Towards the end of a long third day, he created German as a joke. German-speaking people appear not to have grasped this yet." Clearly, he disliked having to translate so much German.

At the top of the page there was a description of the

first performance of Mozart's Requiem in 1791, given as a memorial to Franz Süssmayr, Mozart's brilliant young protégé. The account came from the journal of a certain businessman, a merchant from Linz, who was living in Vienna at the time.

He remarks on the sadness which was felt locally at the death of this remarkable young man, who had already shown great promise as a composer. (The merchant may have been a friend of Süssmayr, though he does not make this clear. Süssmayr's home town was Steyr, a little to the south of Linz.) In particular, he stresses the way the Viennese musical establishment took this stranger, this country boy, to their hearts. That he should be cut down at such an early age was clearly viewed as a great tragedy.

The merchant then comments on the relief felt in Viennese musical circles that the esteemed Herr Mozart, Süssmayr's friend and mentor, though poorly, had not himself succumbed to the same illness. The outbreak of rheumatic fever was diminishing by this time, for which God was to be thanked.

Mozart was well enough to attend the performance, though the music was directed by Antonio Salieri, the Emperor's Italian Kapellmeister and the most distinguished musician in the city. This was, it seems, at Mozart's own request, partly out of respect for Salieri's standing at court, but also because Salieri had been Süssmayr's first teacher on arriving in Vienna. It is also possible Mozart was still too weak to conduct such a long work.

The merchant describes the music in glowing terms, using words such as solemnity and dignity, virtue and nobility. Though he avoids stating it openly, he appears to be marvelling at the newly reformed genius discernible in the work. It has to be remembered that Mozart was still regarded, even at the age of 35, as something of an enfant terrible. The merchant's journal is evidence he now showed a more mature outlook, and Viennese society recognized this.

There follows a letter from Mozart to his sister Maria Anna, his beloved "Nannerl." In the letter, written soon after the Requiem for his friend, for whom he is still in mourning, he is at pains to reassure Nannerl he has made a full recovery from his illness. This he ascribes to the devoted nursing of Constanze. (His wife.)

He goes on to say he is reconciled with his old friend Salieri, and their quarrel is quite forgotten. He describes the occasion when Salieri attended a performance of *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute). "After each item he either nodded, murmured approvingly, or cried *Bravo!* He applauded with generosity and enthusiasm, and afterwards spoke of it as a magnificent work."

He also writes of a reconciliation no less important; that with the Archbishop of Vienna, with whom he had a fearful argument several years earlier. As a consequence of the Requiem's favourable reception, Mozart was rehabilitated into the church.

"How our dear father would have rejoiced to hear of this," he concludes. (Leopold Mozart had died four years earlier in 1787.)

Memories of walking in the park near the university form some of my earliest recollections of childhood. It may have been just a single afternoon, evoked as a series of separate

images, or we might have gone there many times over the course of that summer. I remember it was always sunny, and the flowers were all in bloom at once. I was with my mother, and at some point we met my grandfather. I believe I was two or three years old at the time.

A couple of years later, probably during a school holiday, I recall walking through the park with my grandfather. By then I had become curious about the names of the flowers we saw, for which he appeared to have all the answers. My parents, both of whom were professional musicians, must have been on tour somewhere that summer and I was staying with my grandparents, who lived near the park.

What engaged my grandfather's attention most, more than the common and botanical names of the flowers, was the layout of the paths. Up to that point I suppose I had not needed to consider paths or how to get from one place to another, since I was always with an adult who knew the way. That afternoon he tried to describe not just the various parts of the park and the paths which led there, but also what lay behind their arrangement. I am not sure how much of this he expected me to take in, but he had a gift for passing his enthusiasms on to other people. (I never attended any of his lectures when I was a student – philosophy wasn't my subject – but they must have been fascinating.) He managed somehow to convince me – and remember I could only have been five or six years old – that there was a theorem, a formula, which described how the position of each path was determined. How much of this he actually believed, and how much was improvised simply to amuse a small boy, I will never know. The point was, it worked. That afternoon we discovered places I had never seen before, and all due to the correct application of his formula.

I was reasonably familiar with the major features of the park – the tennis-courts, the swings, the boating lake and so on. The boating lake was probably the most popular area in the park, especially with the children. There was a long queue for the boats, and the nearby ice-cream shop was doing a brisk trade.

We strolled past all this, and then we turned off the main path and followed a line of shrubs. There was another turning, and another after that. I lost count of the twists and the meanders, but we came in the end to another lake, smaller and quieter than the first. Part of the surface was covered with water-lilies, some of which were in flower. A pair of moorhens were foraging at the other side, and a family of ducks swam contentedly in the middle. My grandfather, who had obviously planned all this in advance, produced a paper bag from his pocket and took out two crusts of bread. The ducks immediately changed course and headed straight towards us. We took a crust each and began to feed pieces of bread to the ducks.

When the last of the bread had been eaten I looked round the lake. There was no one else in sight. Were we the only people who knew about this place? I felt certain we couldn't have been trespassing since there had been no gates or fences to block our way. The quietness and the beauty of it all carried a sense of magic which affected me deeply.

When my parents returned from their travels they asked me what I had been getting up to. I told them

about the park and the quiet lake with the water-lilies and birds. They looked at me strangely. I insisted they should take me there and that we had to take plenty of bread with us for the ducks.

"But Stephen," my mother said. "Don't be silly. There is only one lake. There are no ducks in the park."

The first reference to Richard Wagner mentions briefly that he sang at Mozart's funeral in Dresden in 1825. Though based in Vienna after his appointment as Kapellmeister following Salieri's death in 1815, Mozart was still an inveterate traveller. His journeys around Europe with his father and sister, beginning when he was only six years old, had allowed him to glimpse a wider horizon than life in the service of the Hapsburg court could offer. For example, in April 1764, at the age of seven, he arrived in London, staying in Chelsea for 15 months. During this time he met Johan Christian Bach, gave concerts and composed his first symphony. He is quoted as saying his visit to London was a very happy period in his life, and one which he remembered with great fondness. Elsewhere he speaks of his tour of Italy five years later, which culminated in a private audience with the Pope. There is a suggestion in one of his letters that he would have liked to return to London, but the opportunity never arose. His frequently postponed and eventually cancelled expedition to New York, which should have taken place in 1812, was a great disappointment to him, and caused an angry exchange of letters with his publisher.

In the autumn of 1825, in his 69th year and to many observers looking quite frail, he arrived in Dresden to supervise the first performance in Germany of his most recent opera, Charlemagne. He had made the journey against the wishes of his friends and family, and against the advice of his doctor. Even the Emperor had tried to reason with him, but to no avail. Apparently he did not trust the Dresden opera company to carry out his instructions, and felt he had to assert his authority.

The journey across Bohemia via Prague, undertaken during atrocious weather, took more than a week to complete. He arrived in Dresden exhausted, and was too weak to attend the final rehearsals. Instead he arranged for the administrator of the opera house to visit him at his lodgings, where he was encouraged by the news that all his directions had been followed to the letter.

The first performance two days later was a triumph. Mozart had recovered from his ordeal sufficiently to attend, and was warmly received by the audience as he arrived. After the final curtain he was led onto the stage of the opera house to acknowledge the applause of both the cast and the audience. Seated on Charlemagne's throne and leaning forward on his cane, he smiled and wept with emotion as he received a standing ovation which lasted almost half an hour.

Later that night he wrote to Nannerl to describe the events of the evening. It was the last thing he wrote. The letter was on his bedside table the next morning when he was discovered by his host. A doctor arrived, but it was too late. Mozart had suffered a heart attack, possibly while he was asleep, and had died within minutes.

The whole of Dresden went into mourning. Mozart's own setting of the Requiem was given a moving performance three days later by a choir drawn from every church in the city. Richard Wagner was 12 years old at the time and was a member of that choir. It seems to have touched him profoundly. He said many years later he could never listen to the Requiem without recalling when he first sang it. It also engendered in him a lifelong respect for Mozart's music.

The Austrian Emperor sent his most senior ambassador to the memorial service, and attended a performance of the same work the next day in Vienna. The following year, a statue was erected in Dresden over Mozart's grave. The money for it was raised by public subscription and included a generous contributions from both the Emperor, and the King of Prussia. Unfortunately, both the grave and the statue were destroyed amid the bombing of Dresden during the Second World War. The site was redeveloped as part of the post-war reconstruction of the city under the communist administration, and as a result the precise whereabouts of Mozart's remains are unknown.

My happiness at getting a job with the university library was marred by my parents' divorce, which occurred around the same time. Their newly separated paths led them away from the city in pursuit of their musical careers. From time to time postcards would arrive from some exotic place or other, describing the food or the weather or what they were playing, or perhaps mentioning a musical celebrity they had met. It gave me an odd, hollow feeling to read them here in cold, ordinary England; as if I was divorced from them. If I wanted to reply, all I had were the addresses of their agents and the hope my letters would be forwarded in something under six months.

The outcome of all this was that my grandparents were the only immediate family I had left. Though I had a place of my own, I spent a lot of time with them. They seemed glad of the company, and their house, which they had occupied for the 50-odd years of their marriage, had a comfortable, reassuringly familiar atmosphere which connected all the way back to my childhood. In addition, the journey from my flat or from the library to their house took me through the park.

My grandmother played the piano rather well. It had been her love of music which had inspired my mother to take it up as a career. My grandfather was also an enthusiast for music, though he was a listener and not a performer; or as he preferred to put it, his favourite instrument was the gramophone.

Their tastes in music differed. While she was fond of Bach, his preference was for Wagner. I suppose Wagner was an odd choice for a philosopher, in the sense that someone concerned with precise meanings and analytical debate might not normally be interested in the grandiose and the romantic. If there was a contradiction here, he chose not to be concerned by it.

"I am large," he once said, quoting Whitman. "I contain multitudes."

We were in his study one evening when we heard my grandmother playing. I remember the piece was by Bach, possibly one of the fugues from the famous

Forty-Eight. My grandfather paused and smiled. Taking a book from one of the shelves, he glanced at the index then flicked quickly through until he found what he was looking for.

"Browning," he announced. "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha: Forth and be judged, Master Hugues!... What do you mean by your mountainous fugues?"

"There was a book we had to read at school," he went on. "It was intended as an introduction to musical theory, but it almost succeeded in putting me off music for life. The teacher couldn't understand my difficulty. He thought because I liked listening to good music I would want to know how it worked. For me it was like dissecting flowers. It tried to describe counterpoint and fugue as no more than a set of technical tricks, which misses the point. I discovered later, talking to musicians, that it was a terrible book, but at the time I just felt I wanted to listen to music with my soul, and not with the aid of a slide-rule."

"A fugue is a musical labyrinth. That is the best description I can give you; a search through a maze, an infinite digression, the longest distance between two points. Someone once described the labyrinth as the perfect model of the world, since it is endlessly complex and yet irresistibly challenging. That is the effect a fugue has. It draws you into the music like nothing else; it is life itself."

As he spoke the music continued, forming a perfect background to our conversation. It occurred to me at the time that it was like someone weaving a tapestry out of thin air, an impression which has remained with me. Perhaps I also listen to music with my soul. I know nothing about the theory of it.

Further notes on Wagner mention his first job as chorusmaster at the opera house in Würzburg.

As a child in Dresden, as well as his musical activities, he took a keen interest in literature, and in particular the classics. It may be this began the process which led to him working on such a vast scale in his operas; the timelessness and the heroism, the sheer scale of it all.

Having been recommended for the post by his brother Albert, the company's leading tenor, Wagner had the task of coaching the chorus and some of the soloists. During the 1833/4 season the company mounted productions of Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*, and Heinrich August Marschner's *Der Vampyr*. This second work appears to have inspired a love of the gothic in the young composer.

And then my grandfather died. He had been ill for some time, though only in the last few weeks was there any sign it had broken his spirit. Two years earlier, around the time I started work at the university library, he had suffered a stroke which left him slightly lame. As part of his treatment, the physiotherapist recommended a little gentle exercise. So, whenever the weather allowed, he would spend an hour or so strolling in the park.

These walks often coincided with my lunch break, in which case we would meet and talk. His mind was as sharp as ever but he tired easily, so the subject of our conversation was usually of his choosing. More than once he gave me his favourite potted definition of philosophy.

"Always remember," he said. "Philosophers are not looking for answers. There are no final answers. Philosophy is the search for better questions. The investigation never ends."

Another cherished topic was libraries. "Philosophers and librarians are the twin pillars of civilization," he declared. "The librarian's job is to act as both custodian and road-sweeper; shovelling up everything the philosopher unearths and then preserving it. Without us, my boy, you and I, the whole bloody roof falls in; the whole temple of civilization." I remember the way he acted out his little homily; arms outstretched like a diminutive, greying Samson, holding his walking stick in one hand and an imaginary pillar in the other.

I suppose it helped give me a greater sense of purpose to think in this way, particularly when it came to the duller bits of my job. For him, a library was like a church, and training as a librarian was akin to entering the priesthood. He spoke of visits to the American Library of Congress or the Bodleian as if he was a pilgrim returning from a shrine; the British Library was the Vatican and the Mount of Olives all at once.

As we walked through the park I noticed sometimes we had strayed from the more popular paths into quieter areas. We would pass a shrub or flower bed which I had never seen before, though he obviously knew it well and could often reel off the full botanical name without hesitation. I was tempted to ask him about that afternoon, 20 or more years earlier, when our walk had led us to the other lake with its quiet setting and its bird-life. I hesitated, partly because I didn't want to tire him, and because over the years I had almost resigned myself to the idea I must have imagined it all. Soon it was too late to ask.

His health began to deteriorate rapidly, which forced him to retreat; first confining him to his house, then to a single room, and finally to his bed. In the last months he became blind, which he felt was the ultimate insult. But his mind remained active, almost to the end, and he would often ask either my grandmother or myself to read to him. Though he could no longer see his books, he knew where each one was kept, and on which pages his favourite passages occurred. I recalled reading something about Borges in the later part of his life; blind, but with the infinite library of his mind clearly remembered and always within reach.

Mostly he asked for poetry, which he called "That other branch of philosophy." We read Whitman to him, and Eliot, and Shakespeare, as well as translations from Ovid, Homer and Li Po. His library contained no fiction, however. Fiction, as he put it, was "Lies and constructions written by prim women in parsonages and similar types, as a substitute for real life." He saw no contradiction in the fact that his favourite Shakespearean character was Jack Falstaff, the greatest fabricator of them all. Yes, he was large, and contained multitudes.

His funeral was attended by the whole faculty of philosophy from the university, some of whom had been his students before becoming colleagues. Other friends, former students and colleagues came to pay their respects, many of them travelling the length of the country in order to do so. All spoke of him movingly and with great affection.

My mother arrived at the last minute from Paris and had to catch another plane soon afterwards. She only had time to invite both my grandmother and I to stay with her. Apparently she was doing a season of French opera there and had rented an apartment. We promised to get in touch as we saw her into her taxi.

The will stipulated that the university library and the philosophy department could have the pick of his books. Anything left was to be disposed of as the family saw fit. My first task was to sort and categorize them and then to prepare a catalogue of the entire collection, which numbered several thousand titles. I tried to persuade the head librarian to let me use the portable computer to speed up the work. I was told I could have all the pens, file cards and time I needed, but no computer.

When the weather allowed I preferred to walk from my own flat to my grandmother's house rather than go by bus. This meant I could cut through the park, which I always enjoyed. I suppose it was inevitable that at some point I would try to recreate the route we used that afternoon so many years ago when we found the other lake, the quiet place which no one else knew about.

My first attempt ended in failure. I took a turning off the main path, only to find myself back where I had started after a few yards. Feeling rather foolish, I decided to give up for that day. I had another go at it about a week later, this time with a little more success. It was a question of taking my time and trying to remember not only what I saw, but also how I felt then, as a child.

It was a warm afternoon in late spring, as it had been then, and the first roses were in flower. I remembered the start of the path was marked with flowering shrubs, but what colour were they? It had been only a minor point then, something I had hardly noticed, but now I knew they had been a delicate peach-pink. Memory is an odd thing sometimes, calling up detailed images which have lain dormant for 20 years or more. I walked along by the side of the boating lake, past the ice-cream shop, and turned left. To one side I saw a group of rose-bushes, some of which were coming into flower. They were the colour of ripe peaches.

The path curved slightly, then came to a fork. I stopped and tried to remember if I had to go right or left. My memory was blank once more. I knew there were turns, several turns, but the sequence eluded me. I went on for a little way, but I knew it was hopeless. Unless I could summon up that 20-year-old relic of my childhood, I would never find my way there again.

I retraced my steps to the main path and proceeded to my grandmother's house. She was out, but I had my own key so I let myself in. As always, even with no one in it, the house felt at once familiar and welcoming, fitting me like a favourite coat. I went upstairs and turned left into the library. Perhaps I was feeling unusually at ease that afternoon, still buoyed up by my recollection – for the moment at least only partial – of the way we had discovered the quiet lake years ago. Whatever the cause, I looked along those shelves and felt entirely at home.

About an hour later I heard the front door open. It



was my grandmother, returned from doing some shopping. A few minutes later she popped her head round the door.

"Would you like a cup of tea, Stephen?" she said.

"Please." I was surrounded by books. My grandfather's desk was covered with large piles of them, roughly sorted. I had to crane my neck to see over the top.

"How are you getting on?" she asked later as she poured the tea for me.

"I'm getting through them," I said. "There's a lot to do, but I am just working my way steadily from one section to the next."

She left the room and went back downstairs. A few minutes later I heard her playing the piano. Bach fugues again. I was listening with half an ear to the music as I worked. The way the lines of subject and counter-subject braided themselves together cast a spell of some kind. I found myself subconsciously putting together a model of the library inside my head. Somehow everything connected.

The music ended and I surfaced from my reverie. I had been staring at nothing in particular for several minutes; day-dreaming, something I was frequently told off at school for doing. I picked up the next book and got back to work. My tea was getting cold.

A little while later I opened a book to examine its publishing history and discovered a yellowing piece of paper folded up inside it. There were some scribbled notes, an appointment, and a couple of book titles. I looked at the date of the appointment. I would have been six years old at the time. Over the page there were several lines of what looked like algebra, followed by a small flow chart. Algebra had always mystified me, so I tried instead to sort out what the diagram represented. The labels were in pencil and very faint, but one was unmistakable: rose-bushes.

I had another look at the algebra. Was it beginning to make sense? I could not follow the argument sign by sign, but the more I looked at it the more convinced I became that the maths and the chart were the same idea presented in two different ways.

“I was reading something recently about Mozart," he said once. We had been talking about music, as we often did, and about the odd links which sometimes occur between art and science. "It appears Mozart was fond of mathematical puzzles, which probably explains what was behind that game he invented, the one with the cards and the dice where you end up writing minuets."

Mathematics was never my favourite subject at school and the idea of doing calculations for fun, as part of a game, baffled me. I said I was glad we had calculators and computers to do our maths for us now.

"You're missing the point, Stephen. It isn't just a question of getting the right answer. The beauty, the elegance and, yes, the fun of it, lies in how you get there; the route as much as the destination. Personally, I always find algebra to be the most interesting. Al Jabr; the reunion of broken parts. After all the debates and the hair-splitting, the texts and subtexts, thesis and antithesis, the certainties of mathematics can be most therapeutic."

I had a rough copy of the flow chart in my pocket as I walked through the park the next day. The algebra was still unclear, but I felt confident I would not need it. It was enough to know the map was mathematically derived, as he had told me. Over the years I had allowed myself to become convinced it was all a kindly joke on his part, something he made up on the spur of the moment. Here was the proof that he had been perfectly serious.

I turned off the main path by the roses and followed the plan carefully. My first thought was there might not be as many paths as the plan showed, or that I was in danger of doubling back on myself. Several of the paths appeared not to have been used for some time, and were slightly overgrown. I was also nervous I might be stepping off the public areas, and any minute now a park keeper would be chasing me. No one stopped me, and I came across no fences.

There were more trees lining these paths than elsewhere, which gave shade and helped make the place quieter. It felt more like a wood than a public park near the city centre. I took another turn – the last one according to the map – and I had arrived.

There were no benches, but a substantial old tree stump served just as well for a seat. The only sound I could hear was the whispering of a light breeze touching the leaves, and the occasional bird-call. The surface of the lake shimmered in places where the breeze caught it. As I sat watching quietly a family of mallards sailed into view. Further away, among some water-lilies, I could see moorhens. A pair of swallows appeared, swooping low over the water, either to drink or to catch small insects. The water-lilies were in bud; I made a mental note to come back in a few days to see them in flower.

I could hardly believe any of this was happening. To find the place once by chance would have been pleasant enough. To rediscover it after such a long time, a place out of a childhood dream, was simply magical. I expected to wake up at any moment and find the enchantment had dissolved into the air.

I had no idea of the passage of time until I heard a church bell striking three. I looked at my watch. I was true. I had been sitting there for almost an hour. I had to get on with my work. Now I knew how to find the lake I could come as often as I liked.

There was a narrow path which skirted the lake at one side. I decided to follow it, thinking it would lead me back to the more public areas. As it curved round the edge of the water, the view gradually became obscured by tall reeds. I heard occasional bird-calls, but I could see nothing.

Without noticing the transition from woodland and lake-side to open grass I found myself back in the park, though still off the main beaten track. I came to a hedge and a small gateway, and beyond that a street with traffic. Before passing through the gateway I turned for a last look at this place I had rediscovered, but I could see nothing. Stepping out into the street, I recognized it as being close to my grandmother's house, continued on my way.

I examined the plan carefully. Something about it had been bothering me all day. While it had enabled me to find the other lake after so many years, I felt there was more to it than that; something

much closer. I looked at the bookshelves all around me. Was there something of their layout in the map. So did it serve a double purpose?

There were various ways of translating one scheme into another. I could use whole shelves and the vertical supports as paths and corners, or I could count along so many books at a time. The main problem was deciding where to start. If I made an arbitrary choice and went on from there, how would I know when I had reached my goal? Did I know what I was looking for? In the end I used a method which combined both techniques for defining the path, and took a series of random starting-points. At this stage, my grandmother came into the room.

"Shall I make you some tea, Stephen?" she asked.

"Yes please." She turned to go. "I've been meaning to ask you something about these books," I said.

"I doubt if I can help you much," she said. "William had his own way of doing things when it came to his books. He wouldn't let me touch them unless he was there himself."

"That sounds a bit obsessive, don't you think?" I regretted saying it almost immediately. After all, they were happily married for more than 50 years.

"It wasn't an obsession with him," she said, ignoring my faux pas. "He had a system for keeping track of everything. He sometimes called it his formula. Apparently he had worked it all out mathematically. It's not surprising, when you see how many books he had. I told him if he had discovered a foolproof way of storing and tracing books, then perhaps he should publish a paper on it, or at least let the chief librarian at the university in on the secret. I don't think he did anything about it though."

"I've not heard anything at the library about it. Besides, librarians are traditionalists by nature. It's Dewey or nothing. So, you haven't moved any of them recently?"

"Not for years. I gave him a feather duster once and said it was up to him to keep the dust and cobwebs under control. He made a good job of it too."

"Yes. I found the duster last week."

"Have you lost something? Are some books missing?"

"No. I came across some notes he made, years ago. I think I may have worked out how he operated this plan of his. I just wanted to make sure everything is exactly as he left it."

"Not a thing has been moved. He was very precise about it. You were the only person who was to go near the books, until they were catalogued."

"That's answered my question. Thanks."

"I'll go and make the tea."

I tried a few more random starting-points, none of which produced anything conclusive. However, I noticed I kept passing one particular book; a Victorian manual on the classification of roses. (His interests had been wide, and had included certain aspects of the history of science. For example: the next book on the shelf was a translation of Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*.)

I had another good look at the plan. Suppose I started with this book on roses, what would follow? The new path led me to a section of the shelves I had paid little attention to up till then. Whichever way I approached it, I always came to a loose-leaf file – a kind of scrapbook.

I suppose I would have found the file anyway, given enough time, but would I have taken as much notice of it in that case? In making a puzzle of it, had my grandfather been ensuring I would not only find it, but having found it would pay particular attention to it? Part of the fascination in finding the lake after all those years arose because no one else believed it existed, and I hadn't been able to retrace the way without first deciphering the plan.

I started casually leafing through the file, glancing at each page briefly. It consisted mostly of extracts from letters, many of them written by Mozart to his sister Maria. There were also some pages photocopied from a biography of Wagner. In among these documents were several pages of notes, explaining the connection between them. It appeared my grandfather had been working on a piece of historical research on the two composers, and had then abandoned it. There was no sign of a proper text; only these extracts. So why had he felt the need first to hide the file and then erect this elaborate puzzle to attract my attention to it? I decided to read the entire file carefully.

The point of departure for my grandfather's research project was Wagner's opera *Frankenstein* and its links with the late operas of Mozart. Apparently Wagner, according to his own journal and from accounts given by friends, often worked on more than one opera at a time. For example, the four works which make up *Der Ring des Nibelungen* were all begun around 1850 or 1851. The first two, *Das Reingold* and *Die Walküre* were completed within five or six years, though they were not performed until 1869 and 1870 respectively. He continued to work on the other two, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, though they did not receive a public performance until the entire cycle was presented within a single week in August 1876.

Three times he took what might be termed a holiday from his masterpiece to compose self-contained works. *Tristan und Isolde* was written during the late 1850s, followed by *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* a couple of years later. *Frankenstein* was composed between 1871 and 1874, though the first performance was delayed until 1879 owing to the popularity of the Ring.

There are two ways in which Wagner's *Frankenstein* is linked to Mozart. Firstly, there was the general respect which Wagner had had for Mozart from an early age, going back to the time he sang at Mozart's funeral. The second link is thematic.

At some time in the late 1860s, Wagner was shown a manuscript which Mozart had been working on about 50 years earlier. It consisted of a series of sketches for an operatic treatment of *Prometheus*, the libretto of which was to be written by Percy Bysshe Shelley. When this was abandoned the manuscript was placed in a library and forgotten. Wagner got permission to have a copy made, from which he extracted the major themes. These he then used, in whole or in fragments, within *Frankenstein*. In each case, the quotation is acknowledged in the score. Wagner also prepared a preface which appeared in the programme of the first performance of the finished work.

In 1815, following the death of Antonio Salieri, Mozart was appointed by the emperor to the post of Kapellmeister. The official proclamation, a copy of which was in the file, announced that the esteemed Wolfgang Gotleib Mozart (Gotleib being the German equivalent for the more usual Amadeus,) Doctor of Music (Vienna, Cambridge, Paris, Rome,) and Knight of the Papal order of the Golden Spur, was to be accorded the title of Master of the Choir of the Imperial Chapel, having command and charge of the choristers and instrumentalists employed therein, and all music to be performed for official purposes or by Imperial requirement. Mozart had, as the saying goes, arrived.

The following year he began a correspondence with P.B. Shelley, with a view to writing an opera with an English libretto. Mozart was fairly fluent in English, following his stay in London, and felt ready to attempt the setting of an English text. Various possible themes were discussed, but Mozart was keen to write something on a classical subject. (Many of his operas up to this point had dealt with domestic intrigue of one kind or another, though *Die Zauberflöte* was based on the mythology associated with Masonic practice. While *Idomeneo* is named after a minor character from the *Iliad*, the plot was an invention and had no classical basis.)

Three reasons lay behind Mozart's choice of Shelley as a possible collaborator. Firstly, Shelley was living in Geneva at the time, which simplified travel. Secondly, he was considered by many to be one of the finest poets of his generation. Thirdly, he was a classical scholar. When Shelley suggested *Prometheus*, this immediately struck Mozart as the right choice. He responded with enthusiasm, and Shelley invited him to the house he had rented on the shore of Lake Geneva. With the emperor's permission, Mozart set off for Switzerland the following week.

1816 is sometimes referred to by historians and climatologists as "The year without a summer." During the previous year a massive volcanic eruption on the island of Tambora in the Flores Sea caused drastic climatic changes which gradually travelled round the world. A depression settled over Europe in 1816 and remained there all summer. In her preface to her novel *Frankenstein*, which she began that year, Mary Shelley describes how incessant rain confined them to the house for days on end. Byron, who was living nearby, wrote his poem *Darkness* in recollection of this period. "...Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day, and men forgot their passions in the dread of this their desolation..."

One of the pastimes which the Shelleys employed during the long evenings was reading German ghost stories from a book they found in the house. After a day or two they began to invent stories of their own. Mozart arrived in Geneva at this point, and his letters to Nanerl mention how he was enlisted to join in the game.

He admits to being amused by his hosts' sense of fun but, as he points out in one of the letters, he was in his 61st year and found it difficult to keep pace with them. (Byron was 28. Shelley was 24. Mary was only 19.) He also protested he was a mere amateur in composing tales, whereas Shelley and his friends were noted scholars. Nevertheless they insisted he should tell them a story.

"It was either that," he writes, "Or write a symphony in one evening; I was given a choice. For once I was gratified to discover there was no piano in the house. They replied I should sing it. In the end they overruled all my excuses. It was then I recalled a piece of gossip or folklore I had picked up once while visiting Ingoldstadt in Bavaria."

Mozart's story concerned a young man, a native of Geneva, who had gone to Ingoldstadt to study medicine at the university. It seems he was a brilliant student, though weak-willed. Due to a combination of bad advice and undisciplined curiosity, he abandoned his original studies and began to take an interest in the Kabala, the ancient Jewish body of mystical knowledge. However, instead of looking to works such as the *Sefir Yezirah* as a source of wisdom and enlightenment, as its adherents intended, he concentrated on the darker, more dangerous and possibly blasphemous aspects. Specifically, he began to investigate the legend of the golem, the false Adam.

According to the legend, a certain rabbi is supposed to have made a likeness of a man, a statue, using a special type of red clay. (The name Adam derives from a Hebrew word meaning red earth.) He is then understood to have breathed life into his creation by some means.

The young student decided to attempt a re-creation of this golem, though he adopted a different line of approach. His chief deviation from the legend was to build his effigy not of inanimate clay but from the carefully dissected limbs and organs of fresh corpses.

"At this stage of my narrative I paused," Mozart writes. "I took the opportunity to glance at the faces of my audience, in order that I might gauge their reactions. My Lord Byron was highly amused; Mr Shelley also, in a light sort of way. But when I looked at young Mary, whom I was most anxious not to offend, I noted she was regarding me in a most strange and earnest fashion. Far from being shocked by my little tale, she appeared to be fascinated by it, and was hanging on my every word."

The precise method which the student used to reanimate the creature is not known. Mozart's story simply relates that making use both of his newly acquired Kabalistic knowledge, as well as some of the latest thinking in medical science, he succeeded in bringing his creation to life.

Unfortunately for the young man, word of his success leaked out. Soon an enraged mob was hammering at the door of his lodgings. He tried to negotiate with them, but they refused to listen. Armed with hammers, axes and fire, they broke the door down and ransacked the house. The creature was torn to pieces and burnt on a great fire, as were all the books and apparatus. However, the young man was not found in the house and seems to have escaped at the last moment, abandoning his creation to its fate. He was never seen again.

"At the conclusion of my tale, all present congratulated me on the telling of it. A lively debate then ensued in which we tried to determine, for the sake of fashioning a fuller account of the story, how a corpse might be reanimated. Byron mentioned the fire of *Prometheus*, which for a moment brought us to the matter which was the cause of my visit to Geneva.

Shelley in turn suggested the application of a method discovered by the late Professor Luigi Galvani of Bologna, by which he caused the severed leg of a frog to twitch.

"I pointed out there is a significant difference between the leg of a frog and the body of a man. For my own contribution to this discussion I ventured to suggest the use of Mesmerism, which has also been called Animal Magnetism. The others had evidently heard something of Mesmer and his eccentric claims. When questioned further about my knowledge of the subject, I mentioned that Doctor Mesmer was both a family friend and a former neighbour. Indeed – as you will recall, dearest sister – it was thanks to the generosity of the good doctor that my first opera, a slight piece which I composed at the age of 12, received its first performance. I also mentioned the time da Ponte and I employed a Mesmer magnet in *Così fan tutte*, in the scene where Despina the maid appears to revive Ferrando and Guglielmo, who have in turn pretended to take poison.

"The conversation turned to other matters and, the hour being late, I decided to retire. As I left the room, Mary took me to one side to question me further about my story. 'I regret, my dear lady, I have told you all I know of this affair,' I said. 'It is nothing more than a tavern tale which I heard by the way.'

"But do you know the name of the student?" she asked. "I would like to know more of his work."

"His name was Steiner, so I am told. His first name may have been Frideric or Fritz, or perhaps Franz. I forgot which. As I say, it was some years ago, and I heard it only in passing. And there, my dear, you have the sum of all I know on the subject."

Though he enjoyed his visit to Geneva, his letters to Nannerl soon afterwards reflect his growing dissatisfaction with the whole idea of the Prometheus project. It may be he was too busy to devote enough time to it, which is understandable, given the likely responsibilities which arose from his position at court. It is also possible there was a degree of disapproval over his contact with Shelley, who was notoriously anti-royalist as well as being an atheist. Mozart himself was always tolerant of other peoples' views, but there may have been pressure exerted by the Archbishop, or an official of the court.

There is another possibility: artistic incompatibility. Mozart was a practical musician, not an academic. He knew what worked with music and what did not. He was also by this time well experienced in the workings of the theatre. Shelley, on the other hand, was university-educated and a romantic idealist. Though he wrote some verse dramas, he was not a man of the theatre. Perhaps Mozart could find no means of setting to music such cumbersome utterances as "Call at will thine own ghost, or the ghost of Jupiter, Hades or Typhon, or what mightier Gods From all-prolific evil, since thy ruin have sprung, and trampled on my prostrate sons."

Whatever the cause, Mozart abandoned the work two years later, with only some rough sketches committed to paper. Shelley did rather better than this, since he published his verse drama *Prometheus Unbound* in 1820.



Wagner's treatment of Frankenstein as an opera is perhaps the most natural medium for telling the story. Mary Shelley's novel is fragmentary in places, beginning as it does in an epistolary form, and continuing with an assortment of viewpoints: Victor Frankenstein, the creature, Frankenstein again, Walton, and so on. Putting it on stage clarifies the narrative, and provides a better realization of the novel's already visual atmosphere.

Wagner's skill as a dramatist, possibly coupled with the need to work within a restricted budget, or the need to write for one particular singer, produced an interesting theatrical device. Apart from an occasional chorus of villagers or students, the cast list is very short. Walton, the explorer, is on stage for much of the time since he is either telling the story or is listening to the account given by one of the others. Frankenstein comes and goes, as does the creature. The three female characters – Walton's sister Margaret Saville, Mary Shelley herself, whom Wagner decided to bring on stage as well, and the female creature, the second of Frankenstein's creations – appear separately. Wagner decided to give all three parts, for whatever reason, to the same singer.

The first performance of the opera was well received. It entered the repertoire at Bayreuth that season, and was successfully revived three years later. Unfortunately, Wagner's ingenious employment of just one soprano was also an impediment to frequent performances. Later productions have had to cope with the difficulty of engaging a singer who could take on three very different roles in the same work. Clearly the original singer was up to the task, or Wagner would not have written the part for her. Others have had great difficulty in portraying first Mary Shelley (frail-looking and young), Margaret Saville (a respectable English matron), as well as the second creature, convincingly. The expensive alternative of employing three sopranos to play what would then be rather small parts is usually out of the question.

However, there have been occasional revivals of the opera using Wagner's original plan. One such production toured North America in 1930, visiting New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. It is possible the Hollywood film director James Whale saw this version, most likely in Los Angeles. In 1935, his film *The Bride of Frankenstein* was released. In it, Mary Shelley is played by a very young-looking Elsa Lanchester. In the scenes where the so-called "bride" appears, the part is taken by the same actress, this time scarcely recognizable under heavy make-up. (Both Walton and his sister were cut from the films, no doubt for reasons of simplicity.) The idea that Whale "borrowed" this device of doubling the parts from Wagner is attractive, though there is no documentary evidence to support it.

The next morning I woke up plagued with misgivings. I called in at the library and spent a couple of hours looking up references in Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. I emerged with a list of dates and facts which contradicted almost everything I had read the previous day in my grandfather's file. For a start, Mozart died in Vienna in 1791, at the age of 35, with the *Requiem* unfinished. It was completed by Franz Süssmayr,

who went on to have a brief but successful career, dying in 1803 aged 37.

The meeting with Byron and the Shelleys in Geneva was nonsense. When Percy Shelley was born, Mozart had already been dead for a year. There was no indication Wagner, or anybody else, had considered *Frankenstein* to be a suitable text for an opera.

So what exactly had I discovered in the file? What had my grandfather spent all that time working on and why had he felt it necessary to shroud his findings in such an obscure fashion? What about the park? Was it only a coincidence the same map worked both for the lake and the bookshelves?

Much of the material in the file had been photocopied from textbooks. Judging by the typefaces, the layout and the language used, I would say many of those books were quite old; more than 100 years old in some instances.

I had to find a way of resolving this paradox. The accepted version of the story, as given in every history of the period, was unassailable; the facts are well enough documented to be beyond question. But what about the evidence for the other account, the one my grandfather had uncovered? The texts looked genuine to me. I have spent a good part of my career examining and cross-referencing data from old textbooks, sufficient to be confident these extracts were authentic. But if that was the case, why had he not published his findings? Or, to put it another way, having made the discovery, why had he then taken steps to conceal it?

Is it possible for two conflicting accounts of a story to be true? Are there situations where the second set of facts, as set out in the file, could be true, and the normally accepted story mere gossip? I wanted to find out.

I made my way as usual along the path which ran along the edge of the boating lake. When I reached the rose-bushes I turned off to the left. Following the curve of the path for some distance I realized I had missed the expected second turning. I retraced my steps a little way, but there was no other path. I continued for a while, increasingly convinced I was heading in the wrong direction. I saw a path, some distance away, but there was no sign it would intersect with the one I was on. I cut across the grass and joined this other path, only to discover it came to a dead end after a few yards. I set off again in the opposite direction, but this took me along the back of some greenhouses, which I was certain were off limits to the public. A little further on I found my way blocked by excavations, possibly for installing drainage.

"Can I help you sir?" I turned to see a tall uniformed man. At first I assumed he must be a policeman, but then I realized he was one of the park keepers.

"I seem to have lost my way," I said nervously. There was something unsettling about the man, as if he already had me marked down as a trespasser, and possibly a lot worse.

"What exactly were you looking for, when you lost your way sir?"

"I was looking for..., well I thought I knew my way round the park. There was something along here..., a pleasant walk..., and I appear..., I was a little preoccupied." I decided it might just confuse matters if I mentioned the second lake.

"And did you not see the sign?"

"Sign?"

"There is a gate with a sign on it which states clearly that this area is closed to the public."

"I have no idea how I came to be here, but I don't recall seeing a sign. I'm always very careful about that sort of thing."

"Yes, sir."

"Always."

"I see, sir."

"Perhaps you could just tell me the quickest way out of here. I am terribly sorry I came the wrong way. It would be most helpful if you could simply show me where the nearest exit is. I am already rather late."

The keeper said nothing for a moment, then he turned and made his way towards a high fence, overgrown with ivy and Virginia creeper. Producing a large bunch of keys, he unlocked a gate which was hidden in among the greenery. He held it open for me and swung it shut the moment I passed through.

I found myself in an unfamiliar street, some distance from my usual route, and it took me several minutes to discover the way out. In the meantime it started to rain.

“**I**s that you, Stephen?" my grandmother's voice called from the kitchen as I opened the front door. "Tea?"

"It's me. Yes, please."

I rushed straight up the stairs and turned right into the study. Right? The shelves were set out before me, familiar and strange all at once. I scanned along the rows of books: Jane Austen, the Brontës, Dickens, Thackeray, Swift, Trollope, Bennett, Waugh, Galsworthy. For the second time that afternoon I felt completely lost.

Stuart Falconer published one previous story in *Interzone*, quite a long time ago: "Familiars" (issue 33). He lives in Ponteland, Northumberland, where he has been continuing to write steadily, and we're pleased to welcome him back to these pages.

Peter Friend & Li Cross ("Vain," page 41) are sf writers completely new to us. They live in Wellington, New Zealand.

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Feeling Safe to Look

John Clute

Being fixed to the wheel of time, we are a species keyed by nature to long for the still point of Eden: this is normal. If, on the other hand, we were God-Others like those we invoke so frequently in sf texts, and occupied as a condition of Godhood some substratum out of time – some Black Hole in the Praeterite of the sort Geoff Ryman evokes in “A Fall of Angels” (see below) in order to generate an FTL drive capable of escaping the New Worlds entropy gas bag gravity well – then most assuredly we would spend our eternal instant longing for the candy of the wheel, for the attar-sweat of mortality humans give off like pheromones so the Gods can find and fuck them.

Being fixed (in other words) to the one wheel of Time's singular decay, being fixed to the one Hell whose history we may not remember but – tied to which – we repeat ourselves as farce in circles, we who live here long for a gods'-eye view, something we might call, in the first instance, anthropology. Anthropologists are, after all, an embodiment of Eye, of the still gaze of the objective deity upon the turnings of the folk upon the wheel, and when we gaze upon ourselves like anthropologists (or Gods) we feel safe to look. The gaze of dispassion does soothe the skin. But anthropology does tend to see the wheel of fire of human life as a circle of Hell, *huis clos*, and it doesn't, in the end, really suffice. What we need, betimes, some of us, maybe, is sf. If sf is an “inscription of the look” – cf Constance Penley's “The Avant-Garde and its Imaginary” (1977) – then it is a skewed look. Without any hard evidence of the validity of its angle of vision, sf tends to see the wheel of human life as a spiral, a long exodus of homo sapiens from the Garden, through the ruined labyrinths of Now, into the lifeboats. Sf replaces the anthropologist's (or the mimetic novelist's) *huis clos* gaze with a smooth lie of egress. A definition: Sf is the domestication of the escape from Hell.

Hence the allure of alternate history, at the end of a century which has made that smooth lie increasingly harder to see from, harder to tell. If today is the frying pan, and tomorrow the fire, then let us get out of Hell by the side door. Let us rewrite the details which burn, the chains which bind. Alternate histories, by showing us side doors, are a kind of analgesia, and much welcome; they scumble over an historiographical sense endemic to the late-20th century that individual decisions and points of crisis do not in fact matter very much over a course of centuries, that the human species did not arrive at 1994 through a trick of plot, that we are the plot: all the billions of us reiterating the same mortal tale. Alternate histories tell us (against all our knowledge to the contrary) that

individual moments in time do matter, and that the glory of an epiphany or a *trompe l'oeil* can set us free, or at least prove we can do other. So pray there is no sequel, then: that we can get out of the end of the book before the pentimenti show through, the burn marks and the chains of inalterable law, from before and ever. Alternate histories should not be asked to live with consequences.

In *Pasquale's Angel* (Gollancz, £15.99), which is Paul J. McAuley's fifth novel and which is more fun to read even than *Red Dust* (1992; reviewed in *Interzone* 70), the magic fulcrum for the escape from Hell is Leonardo da Vinci's decision to go in for engineering works rather than waste his time as a painter. The consequence is a sudden industrial revolution in the early 16th century, a Breugelesque, Dance-of-Death frenzy that Jim Burns, in his cover art, renders through an oddly austere rendering of what might be imagined to be a natural subject matter for Da Vinci to paint in this world, and in his manner: a neat turn of the screw, one supposes, given the fact that Leonardo paints nothing in *Pasquale's Angel*.

Florence circa 1520 – like the mid-19th century London depicted in William Gibson's and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* (1990) – is caught in a spasm of transfiguration from organic to industrial life (Gemeinschaft to gesellschaft), from the ad hoc to the fearsomely engineered (see next month for a review of Iain M. Banks's *Feersum Endjin*), from intimations of the hellishness of mortal life to the incontestable and articulate hellishness of “utopian” centralism. The protagonist is a young painter, Pasquale de Fiesole, who may well be an historical figure (though I couldn't source him), apprenticed as the novel begins to Giovanni Rosso, who certainly did exist, and soon implicated in a complex industrial-espionage brouhaha, in the company of famed newshound Niccolo Machiavelli, that drives him eventually – after a very great deal of action, much of it incendiary – into Fortunate-Fall exile, which removes him (at novel's end, and before a quite possible sequel in shamanic America)

from the freezing of the spasm into fixity.

At the heart of the new Florence stands a vast edifice, the tower where the aged Leonardo lives in solitude with his catamite and servitors, like some satanic anthropologist. This tower is the home point of a vast network of communication relays. Like the live computer in *The Difference Engine*, it is all eyes: through various apertures, far above the marshalled city, complex optical devices constantly monitor the human lives which have become counters in a map. The nightmarishness of this central orb is augmented by a storyline obsessively driven by measurement, in part because the plot concerns its protagonist's need to solve a couple of Rue Morgue-type murders, and in part because – as in almost any tale of Gene Wolfe's whose protagonist must thread his way to metaphorical meaning through a literal labyrinth – any step out of line in Utopia is likely to cause electrocution. *Pasquale's Angel* – who initially sounds like a gnostic messenger of an inner, more real, more future world – turns out to be a mechanical figure, an optical diktat, a creature of Da Vinci's which flaps its great fake wings at the peak of a night of saturnalia.

When [the wings] opened again, a vision of a detailed landscape was revealed, an artificer's Utopia in which every river was regulated and channelled, every city was symmetrical, and great machines rowed the air.

Pasquale's subsequent exile is surely fortunate.

Excepting that escape, it all sounds terribly grim, and it would be unfair to McAuley to suggest that the savagery underlying his tale of adventure is anything but intended. But the book is, in fact, an astonishingly agreeable read. In this it is like Gibson/Sterling, much of whose text presents their (objectively dystopic) alternative industrializations in terms of steampunk carnival; as opposed to (say) Keith Roberts, whose alterations to history are unswervingly threnodic, and whose characters do not surf the change, eyes wide. Perhaps it is the difference between beginning a journey (both McAuley and Gibson/Sterling, like

good sf writers, empower their stories by sticking very close to the buzz of origins) and finding oneself derailed on a siding (Roberts's characters seem ensnared within the dying murk of the island which is England). The fun of travel – like the fun of alternate history, of anthropology for others – is in leaving the station.

It is good of St Martin's Press to risk their profit margins on an author so irredeemably real – so inextricably caught in this world, however fabulously he may describe it in order to make his stories run – as Geoff Ryman. *Unconquered Countries: Four Novellas* (St Martin's Press, \$20.95) assembles two tales first published in *Interzone*, "The Unconquered Country" (*Interzone* 7, 1984), though in the slightly revised version later published as a separate volume in 1986, and "Fan" (*Interzone* 81, 1994); one story, "O Happy Day", from *Interzone: The First Anthology* (1985); and one long, horribly intense, previously unpublished novella, "A Fall of Angels, or On the Possibility of Life Under Extreme Conditions," written at the beginning of Ryman's career, a tale which Hilary Bailey would have published in the late 1970s in the *New Worlds* anthology series, had it not been cancelled. I spend so much time on bibliography because St Martin's have – not unusually for an American firm when it has to deal with the dragonish mists of Unamerica – rather buggered up their copyright notices, failing to credit *Interzone* with the title story. (This is of a piece with Bantam Books's failure to credit John Crowley's "Novelty" (*Interzone* 5, 1983) when they published the first collection of his stories, which was entitled *Novelty*, in 1989.)

But they are still to be commended, St Martin's, because Ryman doesn't write genre. He does not deal with world-shifting fulcrums (as McAuley does in *Pasquale's Angel*), or (as Samuel R. Delany indicates in his introduction to this volume) the Outside of the Inside, or with characters at the centre of the storm of change or penetration. If one of the various protagonists of "A Fall of Angels" manages an action, it will manifest itself externally as a defeat, and internally as a fined consciousness of trammel. If an alternate world is construed, as in "The Unconquered Country," it is without fulcrum or Eye to give us purchase (which one might call irony) on the fun of the horror of material detail of a world desperately like ours, but ringfenced. If America is addressed, as in "O Happy Day," the address excites an astonishing bleakness of justified paranoia, so intense in this case that we almost feel the protagonists – excluded by their sexuality from the surface of things – to be Third

World, like Third Child in "The Unconquered Country," invisible. If in "Fan" we enter Virtual Reality, it is through the bilked eyes of an ageing single mother whose primary victory is to suss the duration and extent of her psychic bondage. This is the attar-sweat of mortals, a shedding of tears. This is Semele all right, without a god to fuck her.

The strange ride of Tom Holt – *Grailblazers* (Orbit, £14.99) and *Faust Among Equals* (Orbit, £14.99) – continues. Sudden savagaries of wit lose themselves in storylines whose pell-mell, adhoc, disintegrating recklessness with material makes one long for the stable default base of – say – Discworld, or Blandings. What distresses most about reading a Tom Holt novel is not the erratic targeting which so often jars the surface (for instance, his constantly repeated portrayal of young nubile women as deranged housekeepers on guard against a world which might cause their stockings to develop runs: in the second book mentioned here, Helen of Troy is a manic housemaker); what ultimately is really very upsetting about these novels is a sense that Holt, in order to carry off a joke or further a plot, will allow his story to eat itself whole. Again and again – especially whenever he begins to unhinge his *mise en scène* by introducing time travel into the plot – an entire world will be skewed sideways, spoofed dry of verisimilitude, tossed away: and the book will end on a note of abandoned, papier-maché vaudeville. There is absolutely no room for repose in a Tom Holt novel: not because the pace is madcap (because it sometimes simply is not that terribly fast), but because there is no trampoline. And this sounds rather a lot like despair. Both these novels give off an extremely powerful sense that the world is not only shit but void. This may seem to be truth-telling on Holt's part, and perhaps it is; but one does then wonder if the feverish frolics over the surface of events don't perhaps verge on the disingenuous.

The jokes are getting better.

(John Clute)

Germanic Fantasy and Other Kinds

Chris Gilmore

Rhinegold, by Stephan (sic) Grundy (Bantam, \$23.95; Michael Joseph, £15.99 & £9.99) is a substantial book, re-telling the story of the Ring of the Nibelungs (best known from Wagner's Ring and The Nibelungenlied) at great length and dead straight. It is dedicated to Richard Wagner, among others, and

I think the intention is to afford the literary equivalent of a season ticket to Bayreuth in Wieland Wagner's time. It is by this standard that it requires to be judged.

Grundy adopts an elevated style full of rich descriptive passages and including some archaic Nordic words, rather more of which should have been glossed at the back; it's the least familiar, like "wod" and "orlog," that work best, implying a cast of mind significantly removed from the modern; others, like "ween" and "steed" just look affected. He also uses some unfamiliar variants – Wodan rather than Woden or Wotan, Sigifirth for Siegfried, walkurja for valkyrie. I presume this is to serve some overall linguistic consistency, and it enhances an overwhelmingly serious-minded effect; the reader's reaction will thus depend on how seriously he is willing to take the story. Just as the original audience to Aeschylus's trilogy knew what evils would befall the Atreides, many who buy the book will already know it in outline, so the sense of gathering doom, which appears from the moment Loki kills the were-otter, is entirely appropriate. This is high tragedy in the grandest Germanic manner, and is presented as such from the outset; all the more pity that neither Grundy nor his editor has learnt about who and whom, let alone the distinction between aorist, preterite and past participle in strong Germanic verbs.

That aside, there are striking parallels to Greek tragedy, especially in the character of Sigilind, whose husband has treacherously murdered her father and brothers. She must remain true to her marriage vows, but she must also avenge them if she can. She therefore binds her sons to avenge their uncles and grandfather – against their father. The parallel with Elektra and Orestes could hardly be closer, and the outcome is just as gruesome in detail, though quite different in essence.

Yet the Norse Gods (Aesir) are not the Olympians, which presents metaphysical difficulties further compounded by the opacity of Wodan's motivation as he manipulates the development of the story, not entirely creditably, and to an end which hardly justifies the means. They are also more circumscribed, both by Fate (which also bound the Olympians, though less closely) and by obligations to bloodkin (which the Olympians tended to ignore). That obligation cuts both ways: if you have been wronged by someone, you are required to take what revenge you can against all his kith and kin, no matter how innocent, though the degree of vengeance may vary. Thus, Sigifirth (the German Achilles) hacks the living heart out of Ingwe, who has treacherously murdered his father, and doesn't lift a finger to interfere when one of his

followers is violating a woman of Ingwe's household in a mud puddle; neither the act nor the omission in any way compromises his status as hero. In other contexts the book sanctions cold-blooded murder on several occasions as well as glorifying raiding (i.e., hot-blooded murder in pursuit of gain) throughout. Three decades ago I was shocked by H. Beam Piper's *Space Viking* for much the same reasons, and thrilled to it in much the same way. That was a juvenile and so was I; this is adult fare.

But the chief psychological difficulty lies with the Germanic conception of the afterlife, which is fundamental to the actions of all the principal characters: they rejected the concept of honourable retirement. An ageing warrior, whose reflexes had slowed and whose joints had stiffened, could not sit back in the reflection that he had won through where others had succumbed and devote his declining years to imparting lore to the young – far from it. He was in danger of the worst fate of all, to die from natural causes. Only those who met death in battle would be summoned to join the gods at Asgard, there to feast and joust until Ragnarok. Hence the practice (not confined to the old) of fighting "berserk" (i.e., in the front line and without armour) to compel an invitation. That this bleak philosophy influenced real behaviour is certain – there's plenty of historical evidence for it – the only question is how far it permeated daily life. In the context of an heroic myth it is never questioned.

So the tale unfolds, the scenes of rape, mayhem, witchcraft, murder, incest, conspiracy, frenzy and torture interspersed with tenderness, hunting, domesticity, skilled craftsmanship and feasting. The variations in mood and pace help to sustain interest in the Matter of the Walsings, which is the first great family saga of the post-Dark Age tradition. At over 700 close-typed pages Grundy has plenty of room for incident – far more than Wagner could fit into *The Ring*, for instance – but the writing never slackens (once you get used to the grammar), nor does Grundy become discursive; every incident enriches the principal theme. When he uses the longer line even his essays in alliterative verse come off better than any others that I have encountered, including those of Lewis and Tolkien. Most who try it fail, and those who master the rhythm and manage to lay the stresses on the right (as distinct from the easiest) words tend to stick to a narrow selection from the many permitted variations, with monotonous effect. Altogether, this would be an extraordinary achievement from a writer with a string of awards covering decades; for a first novel it's breathtaking.

Finally, no new book can be com-

pletely divorced from the context of its time. This one has qualities which demand that it be taken as seriously as the author could hope for, but it also has resonances with the Germanen Order, Kraft durch Freude and ultimately the latest hate-sheet from any backstreet press in Birmingham or Leipzig. These must be faced, and faced down, otherwise it will join the sorry roll of books that more people buy than read, in this case by becoming the property of the Blood and Honour brigade. And that would be tragic, for though I would blame no one for finding it unpalatable, those who can stomach it have a true classic to enjoy.

The story of girls' boarding-school life, sometimes called "jolly hockey-sticks" must by now be a thing of the past. The names of Angela Brazil and Elinor Brent-Dyer are the only ones to spring to mind, yet the success of *Daisy Pulls it Off* shows that the form has a durability beyond nostalgia. Now Caroline Stevermer's *A College of Magics* (Tor, \$22.95) combines it with an alternative-world fantasy, and why not?

Eighteen-year-old Duchess Faris Nallaneen of Galazon, certainly aristocratic, possibly royal but currently poor, arrives at Greenlaw, a combination finishing-school and ladies' university, where the three-year core curriculum consists of grammar, logic, rhetoric, natural history, natural philosophy, Latin, Greek, algebra, geometry, dance and deportment. Eat your heart out, John Patten! (magic begins in the second year). There she makes friends and enemies (one of each stays with her to the end), gets in and out of scrapes, climbs trees and roasts apples and chestnuts over the study fire in the very best tradition. Stevermer has an acute eye for detail, and is especially good at the symbolism of clothes and exteriors. But there's more to the story than that. The Ruritanian politics of Galazon make Faris a prime target for assassination, kidnap and dynastic marriage, while there are plenty who seek advantage by impugning her character and legitimacy.

This only takes up Part One. Faris proves to be an avatar of the Warden of the North, a quasi-supernatural entity whose folly in a previous incarnation has put the entire universe in jeopardy, and who must now repair the damage – but not at once, which is just as well, since Faris's wicked Uncle Brinker has been up to all sorts of no good, including over-taxing the yeomanry and taking a very unsuitable wife. The transition is a bit sudden, but marked by a sufficiently dramatic episode, and allows Stevermer to shift scene first to this world's version of Paris, thence to Galazon and (for Part Three) its neighbour, Aravill. There

the duties and powers of the Wardency are made manifest in a very fine climax, with strong echoes of James Blish's *Jack of Eagles* and of Greg Bear's *The Serpent Mage*.

But it's Stevermer's world, with its structural conviction and intensity of presentation, which makes this book. It's a wistful dream of how Europe might have fared without imperialism, World War I, socialism and other misfortunes, and she brings to it a vivacious, witty style and references which show very definitely where her sympathies lie. Here people read *Three Men in a Boat*, listen to Gilbert & Sullivan, cap each other's quotes from *Ecclesiastes* and make complicated jokes at the expense of Marie Corelli. The women are beautiful, resourceful and brave, the men dastardly, charming or sometimes both, and the whole extraordinary confection avoids becoming arch or mawkish purely because Stevermer can match her vision with an equally fine ear for prose cadences. The book can be taken straight as a juvenile, or as an exercise in nostalgia for what never was, or simply admired as an artefact, and to keep such aspects in balance demands extraordinary control of tone. Stevermer has met that challenge triumphantly. I don't know where she went to school, but her teachers should be proud. They should also consider enclosing *A College of Magics* with every copy of the prospectus.

Writing about Bridget Wood's last book, *Rebel Angel*, I ventured that it was time she grew up. She seems to have reached the same conclusion, for her latest, *Sorceress* (Headline, £9.99), is a maturer, more ambitious work, and very much darker in tone. The milieu is still Dark Age Ireland, but the Christian era is beginning: instead of a youthful time-traveller the external character is Andrew, a young Christian monk who encounters the royal house of Amaranth just as it is struck by a crisis. He's as overwhelmed as anyone else by the grace and élan of Irish royalty, but he's also mindful of the threat they offer to his faith, no less than the more immediate threat to his vows emanating from Rumour, the voluptuous, not-quite-human Amaranthine sorceress of the title, who is Wood's most engaging heroine to date. Almost equally at a loss is Maelduin, a prince of the sidh, who had previously featured as elemental forces, but are now shown to have hopes, fears and feelings of their own. Maelduin's house has suffered calamity which he must take on human shape to repair – a measure involving a risk to his identity which parallels Andrew's, and is no less serious.

The book has three major plotlines: the quest of Maelduin for the lost

music of the sikh; the mission of Rumour and Andrew to rescue the little princess Theodora from the Lord of Chaos; and the struggle of Cerball and others of the family Amaranth to save the Porphyry Palace from falling to treachery. Wood interweaves the strands and shuttles between viewpoints even more than usual, taking in those of the Gristlen, a Dark Ireland entity that as fallen from grace with its peers and suffered disfigurement and centuries of torture in consequence, and the son he subsequently fathers on a ravished Aramanthine lady. By supplying her supernatural heavies with some motivation beyond mere malevolence and afflicting them with credible internal discord Wood adds a dimension, but perhaps as a side-effect the climax is weak. One totally outclasses the other, the forces of good vanquish the victor, end of story. But she remains the same Bridget Wood, with the unnatural couplings, Dantesque tortures and (for low characters and venal doings) hyper-girlish diction, which have become her hallmark. Not all the jokes on these lines work equally well, but there's a very good scene when a couple of warrior gods appear in the guise of teenage braggarts.

She has also retained some of her besetting sins, notably wilful disregard for resonances and unforgiveably creaky plot-mechanisms. The Gristlen metamorphoses into "The Fisher King," and his son takes up residence at "Grail Castle." This is not a Jack Vance-style exercise in disrespect – far from it, the later chapters are distinctly pious in tone; Wood simply liked the phrases and appropriated them. The phrase "God's plenty" is used in precisely the same context as it appears in *Catch 22*, but again, nothing is made of the parallel. She still mangles familiar quotations, this time from the Bible, to support a spurious conflation of pagan and Christian beliefs. And when Andrew and Rumour have managed to put a whole palace full of murderous monsters to sleep, do they set about cutting all their throats? No way! They're going to be needed in a later scene, so Wood attributes to Andrew a theologically unconvincing (and in the circumstances grossly irresponsible) Jain-style reverence for all life.

Well, it got published, dinnit? Yeh, s'pose so. But it's deeply unsettling to see someone of such unusual talent, both in quality and character, use it to satifice in such a casual fashion. If you weld a roof-rack and a tow-bar to a Lagonda, and use it to lug a caravan to Butlins, it remains a Lagonda; but it is not enhanced by the transaction.

A writer who chooses to locate his or her tale in a highly unconventional milieu has two options: to set out its parameters in a data-dump at

the beginning, or to let them emerge piecemeal as the story progresses. The latter is regarded as more stylish, but is more risky as it makes much heavier demands on the reader. There's also a danger that the writer will devote too much effort to presenting the puzzle (and the reader to "solving" it), to the detriment of the characters, the story or both.

This has happened with Pamela Dean's *The Dubious Hills* (Tor, \$21.95). It's set in a world where all children are born with magical powers of a type that are especially useful round the home, and which are controlled by reciting scraps of poetry; but these tend to decline, often traumatically, in the sixth year, after which the child must begin thinking of an adult career – which may involve magic of an adult type. Interesting idea; but Dean fails to sustain interest in either the world or its occupants. The setting is rustic and primitive, so there are endless descriptions of how the characters cope with their chores; M.A. Foster got away with this in *The Gameplayers of Zan*, but Dean has nothing like his skill. Far too many people are introduced far too soon, and as they have only one name each (of which very few give any clue to gender) relationships are difficult to follow and the effect is cluttered.

Arry, whose viewpoint predominates, is a 14-year-old who finds herself in charge of two infant siblings, one very unruly, so there are tedious accounts of childish misbehaviour. She herself seems to have been brought up in a cultural desert, where quotations from Shakespeare and Milton are valued only for their magical utility, not as literature – even a book of familiar fairytales (into which Asimov's "Nightfall" has been playfully slipped) is a disturbing revelation to her. When she encounters more poetry, from Keats, Yeats and Eliot among others, her immediate and only reaction is to wonder what sort of spells they can mediate. Last and worst, she isn't very bright – her own adult magical skill involves empathy with pain of all sorts, but she's having difficulty with the distinction between physical and spiritual discomfort – now, reader, were you not at that age able to tell a scald from unrequited love?

With all this going on the action proceeds at a snail's pace, made more wearing by a faux-naïf narrative style and the graceless dialogue, which makes sense in terms of the characters but is none the more attractive for that. By page 90 nothing of note has happened except that the village teacher has been exposed as a werewolf, but as he's done nothing worse than to kill a couple of sheep even this revelation is short on drama. Thereafter things pick up slightly – for the rather neat reason

that being a teacher, he becomes a proselytising werewolf – but it isn't until halfway through, when Dean imparts the data-dump that should have come at the beginning and slips Arry a few dozen IQ points, that the book staggers to life. Even so, when on page 242 Arry says "I don't feel somehow, that we've accomplished anything at all," I had to concur; there's a low-key but well done climax, but had I not been reviewing it I'd never have got that far – indeed, I'd most likely never have opened it. The blurb ascribes to the author a "whimsical and wise" voice, enough to make any streetwise bookshop browser drop it with a shudder. It's not that bad a book, but with so much better available, nowhere near good enough.

(Chris Gilmore)

Bad Attitude

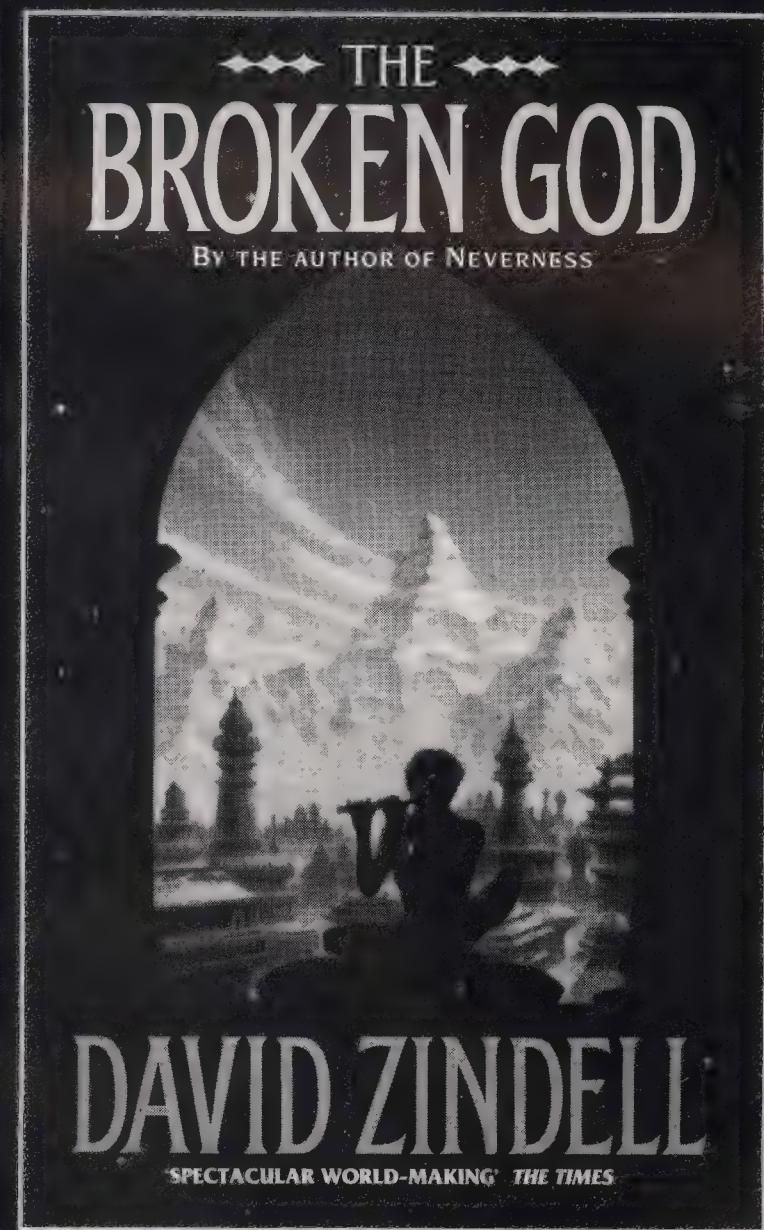
Pete Crowther

Created By, Richard Christian Matheson's debut novel (Macmillan, £9.99), arrived ("strutted" might be more appropriate) into the bookstores in spring with the kind of media hoo-hah and hype not seen within the field for an awful long time. Indeed, the book – bearing an atmospheric (and wordless) cover showing a screaming face partially obscured by blackness, plus similarly coloured page edges and a loss-leader price-tag – had earned itself a rep even before it was half-complete (some would say even before Matheson had put finger to keyboard) but when it finally blustered over the finishing-line it had built up more attitude than Liberty Valance with a hangover.

Such a cinematic analogy will not be lost on R.C., son of the rightly legendary Richard Snr who, as doyen of the old B&W *Twilight Zone* television show and some 13 full-length movie scripts, is surely no stranger to the ways of the wacky magic-lantern shows that comprise today's television. And that's what *Created By* is all about.

In a world where the besuited clones of television company hierarchy are waging internal wars in a never-ending quest to find the most popular programme, the vitriol and the hubris to the great god Rating are spread thick. Banality, pathos and the ever-present laugh-track combine to set new standards while Art goes off the ledge – having crawled out of the window when the first episode of *Charlie's Angels* was aired. The eternal question as to whether it's the user or the supplier who determines the quality of the product was never more apposite than here. All that matters is scheduling-points and bankable

Love, sex, science, philosophy
and mind-blowing space travel; what
more could a reader want!



Dune for the 1990s'

£5.99 net

HarperCollins Publishers

dollars. In the midst of all this, scriptwriter Alan White comes up with the definitive theme for a continuing series: a Vietnam veteran who's scarred both inside and out runs loose in Society righting wrongs and settling debts for money – the only problem being, he uses his own rules. The result is like *Death Wish* without the restraint: excessive violence, full frontal nudity and more fucks per celluloid-inch than the entire backlist of DeNiro, Nicholson and Murphy put together. Anyone bemoaning the inclusion of Australian soaps in the country's viewing schedule, take note: it could be worse.

The critics pan it, the punters love it. Alan White is flavour of the month, year and millennium. But he's unable to shake a nervous apprehension that something is not quite right. This apprehension is made all the more disquieting when, having already got the message from a psychic/medium who specializes in "serving" the industry that trouble is on its way, the first-choice director commits the ultimate in "taking his bat home" by shooting two executives and himself following criticism of his handling of the show.

Add to that the fact that the show's star, Jake Corea, has become such a philandering prima donna he's giving prima donnas a bad name – "Fucker wants pussy and an Emmy... what else is new," one of the industry insiders observes pragmatically – plus White's purchase of a house which turns out to be the site of a gruesome murder, and the scene is set. The switches actually get fully thrown when close friends of White get beaten to a pulp (and they're the lucky ones), the character of A.E. Barek (the Mercenary himself) starts "talking" to White, and the murder which took place in White's house begins re-playing itself – in all of its gory detail – for his sole benefit. And then things get really bad.

Meanwhile, the dialogue moves amidst the carnage like an express train, insightful, cynical and funny as hell, a cross between a Woody Allen routine and Altman's *The Player*, demanding disbelief but maintaining a sheer fatalistic understanding at the absolute credibility of the horror unfolding within the story. (References to a plastic surgeon who goes to prison for tightening a woman's eyelids a little too far – "All she can see is her forehead" – and the Disney corporation, renowned for getting its own way, being referred to as "Mousechwitz," give some idea of the acerbic intensity.)

It would be easy to dismiss *Created By* as a hybrid of schizophrenia (Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*), barbed absurdity (Heller's *Catch 22*) and pathos (Shelley's *Frankenstein*) all served up as an eloquent postscript to Paddy Chayefsky's *Network*, but it

actually deserves to stand on its own merits. It's sassy and smart, beautifully plotted and written, and supremely entertaining. And coming at a time when we "welcome" to our shores a cartoon show in which the two lead characters sniff paint thinners and explode cats for laughs, it's also a salutary warning of what lies ahead.

Of course, one thing lies ahead for everyone, whatever they show on television: death.

But what does it really mean? What will it be like? Such questions have been asked more frequently – with an equally high number of attempts made at providing answers – in the books and films of the horror/fantasy genre than in any other field. But they've never been treated with such compassion and invention as they are in Jonathan Carroll's new novel, his eighth, **From the Teeth of Angels** (HarperCollins, £14.99).

Throughout all of his work, Carroll's characters (and, one suspects, Carroll himself) have had something of an uneasy liaison with the ever-present shadow of mortality. Of course, it could be argued that every character, fictional or otherwise, has a similar relationship by virtue of their inherent humanity, but few of them – or us – actually square up to the prospect until the chips are not merely down but actually counted out.

The most recent exception – and there aren't many – must be the staunch but eminently flawed Harry Angstrom in John Updike's quartet of "Rabbit" novels, who spent an entire book (*Rabbit at Rest*) coming to terms with life, his leaving of it, and himself. It's the latter element that, in the final analysis, must be regarded as the most important.

Equally filled with questions, regrets and a healthy supply of pissed-offness, Wyatt Leonard, self-confessed homosexual and one-time nationwide star of television's *Finky Linky Show*, faces his terminal condition (he has leukemia) about as bravely as anyone could expect. But who wants to be brave?

In the middle of his elaborate mental preparations for "the end" and his frequent bouts of moroseness, Leonard's friend, Sophie, shows him a letter she received from her brother, Jesse. In the letter, Jesse talks about meeting an Englishman called McGann who met Death in a dream. As one might expect, the dream-McGann asked Death a few questions – what is it like? should we be afraid? and so on – only to receive obscure and enigmatic answers that serve only to deepen his confusion. But when he wakes up in the morning, McGann discovers a deep scar on his body.

More dreams follow, with McGann asking Death more questions and

receiving more answers – some of which, admittedly, begin to make more sense – and more scars. Following any dream in which he understands Death's response the resulting scar is smaller, but the cumulative effect is effectively killing McGann, who will not recount his dream conversations for fear the same fate might befall anyone he confides in. He even goes so far as to tell Death that he wants to stop, but Death says that he cannot.

Soon after this, Sophie's brother disappears in Vienna.

Sophie calls in an old agreement that says Leonard must do anything she wishes: her wish is for him to accompany her to Vienna to find Jesse. When they get there, Leonard and Sophie discover that Jesse is also having the dreams and he needs someone to talk to. He asks for Leonard. "Why me?" Leonard asks. "Because you're terminal," comes the reply.

Weaving into the story Arlen Ford, a former movie star who dropped out of the industry and went to ground in Vienna, Carroll splits the book into two first-person narratives, Arlen and Wyatt, coming closer in the process to lifting at least the hem of Death's veil of mystery and intrigue than any before him. But, as is always the case with Carroll, there are no great revelations, only obvious and inevitable conclusions and bitter rationality. His work might best be regarded as a mirror which he holds up to our faces so that we might see and understand ourselves better.

In this respect, it would be appropriate – if pretentious – to label Carroll as a philosopher, but above all else he is a storyteller, treading a similar path to that worn by Alice Hoffman, who posed equally important questions in *Seventh Heaven* and *Turtle Moon*: the difference is that Hoffman resides in the mainstream, despite her frequent inclusion of ghosts and angels, while Carroll's pigeonholing in the horror category – despite that achievement being with an octet of books that are more eloquent and far less genreified than anything else to be found there – has undoubtedly marginalized his position. Nevertheless, apparently unperturbed, Carroll has maintained and even surpassed his earlier heady standards with *From the Teeth of Angels*, and it stands as one of that increasingly rare breed of novel which virtually demands the reader turns back to the first page to re-live the story immediately.

Highly recommended.

There's a terrible and inexorable gloom at large in much of the so-called horror fiction currently produced, particularly in the UK and certainly within the short story field.

The very hopelessness of both the individuals in these stories and their

surroundings suggests a return to the days of the old "kitchen-sink" tales of Lynn Reid Banks and Alan Sillitoe, sombre mini-dramas of unrequited love, early death, abortion, dingy bed-sitters and eternally rain-soaked cobbled streets. This new vanguard starts low and moves downward at a relentless pace.

Rarely are there likeable protagonists or even any whose minds seem entirely in sync. Of course it could be argued that this is kind of a pre-emptive *deus ex machina*, a necessary plot-foundation without which the story's premise simply will not stand up. And, to an extent, that is true.

A story, for example, about an embittered hunchback who can only face the world if it is reflected in a rain-puddle – and who then goes on to devise a plan whereby he can "create," with some nifty wielding of his trusty scalpel, a perfect lifetime-partner out of a local whore – actually needs the physical limitations of the protagonist to work its downbeat rationale. The question must be how far can one legitimately contrive a situation simply to meet a pre-conceived and bizarre denouement without adversely affecting the enjoyment or, at least, entertainment factors?

The delicate line between out-and-out contrivance and masterful invention lies somewhere between the tattooed Robert DeNiro-character in the weak remake of John D. MacDonald's *Cape Fear* and the confused protagonist in Nicholas Royle's thought-provoking *Counterparts*, respective low- and high-points in the new catch-all that horror-fiction now seems to represent.

Those interested in further study need look no further than Chris Kenworthy's *The Science of Sadness* (Barrington, £4.99), his third anthology of "experimental" fiction (which rather neatly side-steps any restrictions imposed by the term "horror"). The hunchback story outlined above appears here.

Experimental? Hmm. What is experimental fiction? What does it constitute or comprise? Is it the mechanism – D.F. Lewis's curious "The First Mover," a hybrid narrative of second-person-present and third-person-past, for example – or the content (a woman who carries a constantly-crapping parrot on her shoulder wherever she goes, as in Sarah J. Evans's "The Parrot")? Is it the telling of the tale or the tale itself?

Naturally, it would be churlish to bad-mouth genuine attempts to widen and expand outmoded constraints. Experimentation is as necessary to the furtherance of literature and the arts generally as it is to the quest for a cure for cancer. But too much of the material here seems to be a case of the

writers sitting at their machines not only with a blank sheet of paper but a blank mind as well. They're like painters who begin a project by covering the canvas in black paint and then add the colour later. The results are inevitably unremittingly sombre.

But, in the end, that's probably the only real criticism one could level at this anthology...and the editor might well respond with Well, that's what I was looking for. So be it. Indeed, Kenworthy does point out in his editorial that the story must always come first and the SFX second. Can't argue with that, either.

In fact, despite my reservations on the book as a whole, there are some excellent pieces on offer here, not least Joel Lane's paean to individuality and survival, "Like Shattered Stone," and Conrad Williams's apocalyptic "The Cog," plus the always dependable Nick Royle (although his "The Mad Woman" is not of his best work) and Des Lewis.

So, buy or pass by? The answer depends on what you're wanting to get out of it. Considering the modest asking-price and the fact that, read in small chunks, it does serve to set the reader thinking, it's worth a look. But maybe the contributors to this and other collections and magazines – plus their editors – could set their collective and individual sights on telling stories about average people in interesting situations that occasionally have some optimistic outcomes, not on spinning metaphysical and surreal texts about losers and outsiders. Literature and the enjoyment of it must surely include at least some element of being able to identify with one or two of the characters: I can't do that with *The Science of Sadness*. But maybe that's just my bad/good* luck. (* Delete as applicable.)

(Pete Crowther)

Non-Fiction Roundup

David Pringle

Scottish Fantasy Literature: A Critical Survey by Colin Manlove (Canongate, £16.99) is a competent and at times provocative account of Scotland's contribution to the fantastic tradition. It's by a critic of repute (his earlier books include the worthy *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies*, 1975, *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature*, 1983, and a recent one which I had not heard about until now – *Christian Fantasy: From 1200 to the Present*, Macmillan, 1992). Authors "surveyed" in some depth include James Hogg, George MacDonald, R.L. Stevenson, Andrew Lang, J.M. Barrie, Neil Gunn,

Alasdair Gray and Margaret Elphinstone, among others. David Lindsay, author of *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), is also discussed here, even though one would not have thought of him and his work as particularly Scottish (but Manlove makes a convincing case). As a reader who was born in the family home of one of these writers – Viewfield, Selkirk, birthplace of Andrew Lang – I naturally found it all of great interest.

This book raises the question: why, when there is such a rich tradition of fantasy, is there no distinctively Scottish science fiction? The names of J.T. McIntosh and Iain Banks are mentioned in passing by Mr Manlove, but clearly "Scottish sf" as an entity scarcely exists; nor, for that matter, do Irish sf or Welsh sf, although the contributions of those other Celtic-fringe countries to mythological fantasy and supernatural horror likewise have been vast. The answer would seem to have to do with a relative lack of urbanization in the Celtic countries; it's precisely those nations which are most cut off from their rural, folkish roots which have been most likely to create important traditions of scientific romance or science fiction – England, the USA. Perhaps sf is essentially a "deracinated" form, a folklore for city-dwellers who have forgotten the folk tales of their ancestors.

Ironically, one major Scottish-born fantasist is passed over by Colin Manlove, on the basis that his best-known book, *The Wind in the Willows*, is a quintessentially "English" fantasy. Now we have a new biography to redress the balance, *Kenneth Grahame: An Innocent in the Wild Wood* by Alison Prince (Allison & Busby, £17.99). Readable, well researched, it is more outspoken than earlier biographical studies which were written under the shadow of Grahame's widow, Elspeth. Perhaps some readers may feel that Alison Prince is a little lacking in generosity to the unfortunate Elspeth Grahame when they read passages such as this: "She and Kenneth never spoke the same language. He had from an early age moved into the Graeco-Latin English which is common to educated people, whereas Elspeth had continued to speak basic Anglo-Saxon. The baby-lispings of their written correspondence provided them with a common means of expression, but in speech, there must have been a gulf of non-comprehension which was ultimately too wide to span." Ouch.

Still on the subject of nationality in fantastic fiction, I must give qualified praise to Nicholas Ruddick's *Ultimate Island: On the Nature of British Science Fiction* (Greenwood Press, no price shown), number 55 in this American publisher's "Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction

and Fantasy." Ruddick is a deracinated Britisher who has lived in Canada for many years – not to be confused with that other Canadian Englishman, David Ketterer, who wrote *Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Indiana University Press, 1992). Whether or not there's a Canadian sf, no one doubts that there is a British, or rather, as I've said, an English sf – and still the best book on the subject of the UK's distinctive tradition is Brian Stableford's *Scientific Romance in Britain, 1890-1950* (1985; buy a copy in your local remainder bookshop while you can). Unlike Stableford, Ruddick makes a determined effort in rather too small a compass (his book is only 182 pages long, not counting bibliography and index) to yoke together the scientific romance and later science fiction, exploring the motifs of "Island" and "Disaster." The twin heroes of this study, the beginning and the end of British sf for Mr Ruddick, are H.G. Wells and J.G. Ballard; and, in literary terms, this is a judgment I cannot fault – even if I believe he's a bit unfair to other writers along the way, notably Clarke, Aldiss and even Stableford. In between, he's good on such comparatively neglected figures as R.C. Sherriff (author of *The Hopkins Manuscript*, 1939) and John Christopher.

Where I, and (I hope) most Interzone readers, would part company with Nicholas Ruddick is in his closing judgment that British sf "died" in the 1970s. He takes Christopher Priest's announced departure from the field, in 1979, as a defining moment (one of Ruddick's earlier books was a monograph on Priest). It seems everything since then has been fantasy, or nostalgic pastiche, or pseudo-American – Ruddick has a truly British dislike of space opera, although he's not all that keen on the Moorcockian "New Wave" either. The only post-1980 British sf writers he deigns to mention in his "Polemical Conclusion" are Iain Banks (that Scottish fellow again) and Ian McDonald (from Northern Ireland, but Manchester-born). There is no mention of Interzone, nor of any of the authors this magazine could be said to have nurtured, no word at all for such busy producers as Paul J. McAuley or Stephen Baxter or Eric Brown, nor indeed for such award-winning writers as Geoff Ryman, Gwyneth Jones and Colin Greenland. Somebody, somewhere (probably in Canada or Australia), should now write a study of British sf since 1980, valorizing such works as Ryman's *The Child Garden*, Jones's *White Queen*, McAuley's *Red Dust*, Richard Calder's *Dead Girls...*

Needless to say, an aspect of British sf which Ruddick totally overlooks (and who can blame him?) is the paperback-original sf novels of the

1950s, produced in vast quantities by the likes of John Russell Fearn, Bryan Berry (who died young), E.C. Tubb, Jonathan Burke, Kenneth Bulmer and (slightly later) R. Lionel Fanthorpe. Many of them laboured under such publisher-imposed pseudonyms as "Vargo Statten" and "Volstead Gridban." Stephen Holland has done much useful spadework in this area, in his *Vultures of the Void* (with Philip Harbottle; Borgo Press, 1992) and in his invisible pulp scholarship which fed into the second edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (ed. John Clute and Peter Nicholls; Orbit, 1993). Holland's most recent book is *The Mushroom Jungle: A History of Post-war Paperback Publishing* (Zeon Books [20 Whitecroft, Dilton Marsh, Westbury, Wilts. BA13 4DJ], £14.95), a physically attractive illustrated trade paperback somewhat marred by typographical errors and poor editing. Despite the omission of the word "British" from the subtitle, it deals purely with the UK scene and in particular with the produce of those fly-by-night publishers who flourished circa 1946 to 1955. (Surprisingly, as the all-knowing Brian Stableford has pointed out elsewhere, Britain had copious amounts of mass-market paperback sf well before the Americans; in the USA, Ballantine and Ace didn't get going until 1953, and Pocket, Dell and Bantam published very little science fiction before that date.) Holland deals entertainingly with the whole range of this downmarket UK publishing, not only with the sf which was an important part of it, but with all the westerns, thrillers, Foreign-Legion novels, pseudo-Tarzans and sleazy "romances" too. All forgotten now, except by the growing band of paperback collectors who value, say, a Hank Janson first edition with a Reginald Heade cover very highly indeed.

What I miss in Steve Holland's book is something that he didn't set out to give: namely, an account of the "above-board" British paperback revolution, the one which was led by such imprints as Penguin, Pan, Corgi, Panther, Mayflower and Four Square/New English Library. Of course, there have been studies of Sir Allen Lane and Penguin Books; but, that august institution aside (much boosted, like the BBC, by the effects of World War II and by government favouritism in the matter of paper rationing), the history of British paperbacks has yet to be written. I know of no book other than Holland's which even begins the task, and his work is to be valued for that reason. (There are also a few scattered writings by Professor John Sutherland; but I want more, much more.) There have been several books on the American paperback revolution, none at all on the British. I would judge the peak of the phenomenon to have come in

the years just after Holland's book closes – roughly, the period 1957–1963, a few years either side of the Lady Chatterley trial. I long for a good study of the subject: failing some ideal work by Holland and Sutherland in collaboration, perhaps I'll have to write it myself.

There's no space to deal in depth with other recently-received non-fiction, but mention should be made of a brace of books from the American specialist publisher McFarland (distributed in Britain by Shelwing Ltd., 127 Sandgate Rd., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2BL). *Serials-ly Speaking: Essays on Cliffhangers* by William C. Cline (£29.95) consists of nostalgic essays on cinema serials, many of them sf or fantasy. *Kings of the Jungle: An Illustrated Reference to "Tarzan" on Screen and Television* by David Fury (£37.50) is just what its subtitle says (although I would quibble that it contains no account of the Indian-made Tarzan movies, nor the pornographic ones such as *Tarzan and the Valley of Lust*, nor even the animated TV series). Both books are perfectly produced, to my taste, nicely illustrated on acid-free paper with bindings which no doubt will last a thousand years. We don't really have publishers like McFarland in Britain, producing well-made "scholarly" volumes (as opposed to tacky coffee-table products) which cater to enthusiasts of the byways of popular culture. It would be nice to see many more of their books on this side of the Atlantic – at affordable prices.

Finally, the *Skoob Directory of Secondhand Bookshops in the British Isles*, fifth edition, is an oversized paperback from Skoob Books Publishing (£6.99). "Ideal for the pocket," says a back-cover quote; well, maybe earlier editions were pocket-sized, but this new version certainly won't fit into any pocket I possess. "Ideal for car-owners who can actually get to places like Hay-on-Wye, on the Welsh border," would be nearer the mark. But even if I have to photocopy the relevant pages before I go anywhere by my favoured mode of transport, the train, there's no doubt that this will be a useful reference resource. Many sf/fantasy dealers are listed (although not all that I know of), as well hundreds of other second-hand bookshops of all types. I'm a bit disconcerted to find that my two favourite current shops right here in Brighton are not listed (one of them, admittedly, is very small and recent), and certain others which do get in are not, to my way of thinking, second-hand bookshops at all, but nevertheless ... I'll be consulting this book before I go to any new town, and perhaps all you other book-buyers out there would be well advised to do the same.

(David Pringle)

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Books Received

April 1994

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Key to paperback descriptions: **A-format** = the usual small "mass-market" paperback ("Penguin size"); **B-format** = the larger "quality" paperback ("Picador size"); **C-format** = the still larger "oversize" trade paperback, usually a hardcover-size book bound in paper covers; **small-press paperback** = any unusual shape or size of paperbound book used by a non-mainstream publisher.

Allen Roger MacBride. **The Shattered Sphere: Second Book of The Hunted Earth.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85734-9, 413pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *The Ring of Charon*, in which the Earth was stolen by aliens – in this volume, the planet has been found again, and humans have the problem of how to get it "home"; glad to see they're still thinking big, these American skiffy writers.) July 1994.

Attanasio, A.A. **Kingdom of the Grail.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-20870-4, 500pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; it's described as "a richly imagined historical saga combining elements of the Arthurian legend, romance and religion"; Attanasio seems to be becoming more prolific [see the following two titles]; he's an oddball writer, and the only Hawaiian sf/fantasy author we know about.) 9th May 1994.

Attanasio, A.A. **The Moon's Wife: A Mystery.** "The brilliantly erotic novel of occult passion." New English Library, ISBN 0-450-60640-6, 234pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Van Houten, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 5th May 1994.

Attanasio, A.A. **Solis.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-450-60642-2, 184pp, hardcover, cover by Mick Van Houten, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1994.) 5th May 1994.

Beahm, George. **The Stephen King Story.** Introduction by Michael R. Collings. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0710-5, 422pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Account of the career of the leading American horror novelist; first published in the USA, 1992; it sort of masquerades as a biography, but it's really a rather scrappy "chronological look at the life and work of..." – if you get the distinction.) 7th April 1994.

Bujold, Lois McMaster. **Bararrayar.** "Three-time Hugo and double Nebula Award winning author." Pan, ISBN 0-330-31720-2, 389pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Neil Jones in *Interzone* 59; winner of the 1992 Hugo Award as best sf novel.) 6th May 1994.

Card, Orson Scott. **The Call of Earth.** "Volume Two of Homecoming." Legend, ISBN 0-09-919941-6, 304pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 73.) 7th April 1994.

Carroll, Jonathan. **From the Teeth of Angels.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224094-

7, 223pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; the sixth in a loosely connected series which John Clute rather prematurely labelled Carroll's "Answered Prayers Quintet.") 3rd May 1994.

Day, David. **Tolkien's Ring.** Illustrated by Alan Lee. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-261-10298-2, 183pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Mythological/critical study, first edition; it's blurbed as "a literary detective work about J.R.R. Tolkien's inspiration and sources," but it contains no bibliography and so one suspects it's really just an excuse for another large-format, attractively illustrated coffee-table book.) 3rd May 1994.

Donnelly, Joe. **Shrike.** Century, ISBN 0-7126-5861-0, 576pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 28th April 1994.

Donnelly, Joe. **Still Life.** Arrow, ISBN 0-910391-5, 554pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1993.) 28th April 1994.

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Year's Best Science Fiction: Eleventh Annual Collection.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-11104-5, ix+591pp, hardcover, \$26.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; it contains 23 stories by writers ranging from Brian Aldiss and Joe Haldeman to Bruce Sterling and Nancy Kress, including two from *Interzone* – "Chaff" by Greg Egan and "Lieserl" by Stephen Baxter.) July 1994.

Elliott, Kate. **Jaran.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-32982-0, 494pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; a debut novel in the "planetary romance" idiom.) 6th May 1994.

Evans, Christopher. **Aztec Century.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05712-2, 352pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Taylor, £4.99. (Alternative-world sf novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 74; winner of the 1994 BSFA Award as best sf novel, and shortlisted for the Welsh Arts Council Book of the Year Award.) 28th April 1994.

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **Raven Walking: The Dragon Circle, Book One.** Heinemann, ISBN 0-434-00038-8, 412pp, C-format paperback, £8.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1994.) 5th April 1994.

Hambly, Barbara. **Sorcerer's Ward.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21781-9, 348pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1994.) 25th April 1994.

Hamilton, Laurell K. **The Laughing Corpse.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-59561-7, 374pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Dietrich, £4.99. (Fantasy/mystery novel, first published in the USA [?], 1994; apparently a follow-up to the author's *Guilty Pleasures*, which NEL published last year.) 5th May 1994.

Harrison, Harry. **Stainless Steel Visions.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-992560-5, 254pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, £4.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1993; it contains 13 stories old ["The Streets of Ashkelon"] and new ["The Golden Years of the Stainless Steel Rat"].) 21st April 1994.

Hollick, Helen. **The Kingmaking: Book One of Pendragon's Banner.** Heinemann, ISBN 0-434-00068-X, 604pp, C-format paperback, £8.99. (Arthurian historical novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut novel by a new British writer.) 27th June 1994.

Holt, Tom. **Grailblazers.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-191-0, 357pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Lee, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1994.) 2nd June 1994.

Jones, Stephen, and Dave Carson, eds. **H.P. Lovecraft's Book of Horror.** Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-231-1, 450pp, B-format paperback, cover by Bruce Pennington, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA [?], 1993; it contains the entire text of Lovecraft's long essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature" plus a generous selection of the stories which are praised in it; rather a good idea: some of the tales, such as those by Dickens, Lytton, Maupassant, Stevenson, Poe, Kipling and Machen, are very well known and available in a score of other anthologies, but the book is well worth having for the more obscure items, which include "The Spider" by Hans Heinz Ewers, "The Dead Valley" by Ralph Adams Cram, "Fishhead" by Irvin S. Cobb and "Lukundoo" by Edward Lucas White, among others.) 21st April 1994.

Knight, Kelvin M. **Miniature Magic: A Clever Collection of Off-beat Fantastical Short Stories.** Knight [3 Saint Ronan's Rd., Southsea, Hants. PO4 0PN], ISBN 1-890099-00-X, 50pp, small-press paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy collection, first edition; five short tales, self-published by a new writer.) No date shown: received in April 1994.

Little, Bentley. **Evil Deeds.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0878-6, 308pp, hardcover, cover by Simon Dewey, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA as *Death Instinct*, 1992.) 5th May 1994.

Little, Bentley. **The Summoning.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4197-X, 598pp, A-format paperback, cover by Simon Dewey, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 79.) 19th May 1994.

McAllister, Bruce. **Dream Baby.** Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-89025-7, 434pp, trade paperback, cover by Thomas Canty [unseen], \$12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; proof copy received; reissue, in "snob-back" format, of a rather fine Vietnam War novel with strong sf elements; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 57.) August 1994.

Manlove, Colin. **Scottish Fantasy Literature: A Critical Survey.** Canongate, ISBN 1-898410-20-8, 263pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Critical study of fantasy, first edition; it deals with writers of Scottish extraction, ranging from James Hogg and George MacDonald to Alasdair Gray and Margaret Elphinstone.) 28th April 1994.

Mann, Phillip. **A Land Fit for Heroes, Vol 1: Escape to the Wild Wood.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05716-5, 284pp, A-format paperback, cover by Adrian Chesterman, £4.99. (Alternative-world sf novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 79.) 28th April 1994.

Matheson, Richard. **Earthbound.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85712-8, 223pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Horror novel, first published under the pseudonym "Logan Swanson," 1982; this revised text first published in Britain under the Matheson name, 1989.) August 1994.

Newman, Kim. **The Original Doctor Shade and Other Stories.** Foreword by Neil Gaiman. Pocket, ISBN 0-671-71562-3, 351pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf/fantasy/horror collection, first edition; Newman's debut volume of shorter works, it contains 15 stories, seven of which first appeared in *Interzone* and one of which, "The McCarthy Witch Hunt," is original to the book; recommended; a companion volume, *Famous Monsters and Other Stories*, is promised for next year.) 26th May 1994.

[Ong, M. P., ed.] **Skoob Directory of Secondhand Bookshops in the British Isles**. 5th edition. Introduction by A.N. Wilson. Skoob Books Publishing [25 Lowman Rd., London N7 6DD], ISBN 1-871438-52-7, xli+340pp, small-press paperback, £6.99. (Handbook to used-book dealers, including many sf/fantasy specialists; dates of earlier editions not given.) No date shown; received in April 1994.

Ore, Rebecca. **Slow Funeral**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85201-1, 320pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) July 1994.

Prince, Alison. **Kenneth Grahame: An Innocent in the Wild Wood**. Allison & Busby, ISBN 0-85031-829-7, 384pp, £17.99. (Biography of a famous children's writer and fantasist, first edition.) 23rd May 1994.

Raymo, Chet. **The Dork of Cork**. Abacus, ISBN 0-349-10458-1, 354pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy [?] novel, first published in the USA, 1993; it's blurbed as combining "the magic of science with the appeal of a surreal fairytale"; the author is a professor of astronomy in America, known for his "eight books of nonfiction, which have been lauded as some of the finest nature writing of our time.") 19th May 1994.

Silverberg, Robert. **Thebes of the Hundred Gates**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647646-5, 120pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Sf novella, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 63.) 9th May 1994.

Simmons, Dan. **Lovedeath**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4345-X, 468pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 83.) 12th May 1994.

Straub, Peter. **The Throat**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21849-1, 875pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1993; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 78.) 9th May 1994.

Tepper, Sheri S. **The Awakeners: Northshore, Southshore**. Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-89022-2, 489pp, trade paperback, cover by Thomas Canty [unseen], \$13.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA in two volumes, 1987; proof copy received; according to the blurb, "now, for the first time, this subtle and fascinating work is available together as a single book" – pah, it appeared in Britain this way from the beginning [Bantam Press, 1988; Corgi, 1989].) July 1994.

Varley, John. **The Ophiuchi Hotline**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21734-7, 247pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1977; this was Varley's debut novel, back in the days when he seemed the hottest thing in American sf.) 25th April 1994.

Watson, Ian. **The Coming of Vertumnus and Other Stories**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05766-1, 288pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; it contains 11 stories, two of which [including the title piece] first appeared in *Interzone*; recommended.) 19th May 1994.

Williams, Tad. **Siege: To Green Angel Tower, Part 1**. "Book 3 of Memory, Sorrow and Thorn." Legend, ISBN 0-09-931441-X, 815pp, A-format paperback, cover by Michael Whelan, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1993 [as part of the complete, one-volume hardcover]; there's an apologetic preface by editor John Jarrold explaining that this novel was so damned long that it just had to be split into two 800+-page volumes for mass-market paperback release.) 7th April 1994.

Wolverton, Dave. **The Golden Queen**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85656-3, 318pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the publishers are packaging it as a Star Wars clone, or, as editor Dave Hartwell puts it in a frank accompanying letter: "In the world of publishing popcorn, [this] is the finest quality hot, buttered popcorn.") August 1994.

Wurts, Janny. **That Way Lies Camelot**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224602-3, 304pp, hardcover, cover by Janny Wurts, £15.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA [?], 1994; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; the author's wrap-round cover illustration for her own book is rather striking.) 19th May 1994.

Novelizations, Spinoffs, Sequels by Other Hands, Shared Worlds, Sharecrops

This is a list of all books received which fall into the above sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror (including non-fiction about shared worlds, etc.).

Adams, Douglas. **The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-201-0, 178pp, hardcover, £4.99. (Humorous sf radio novelization, first published in 1979; based on the author's own scripts; this, and the two following titles, are part of a series of "miniature" hardcovers from Orion Books Ltd – dinky little pocket-sized books at mass-market paperback prices; nice, even if the print is a bit small.) 14th April 1994.

Adams, Douglas. **Life, the Universe and Everything**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-209-6, 184pp, hardcover, £4.99. (Humorous sf radio novelization, first published in 1982; based on the author's own scripts.) 14th April 1994.

Adams, Douglas. **The Restaurant at the End of the Universe**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-208-8, 196pp, hardcover, £4.99. (Humorous sf radio novelization, first published in 1980; based on the author's own scripts.) 14th April 1994.

Drake, Chris. **UFO/Space: 1999**. Boxtree, ISBN 1-85283-393-9, 95pp, very large-format paperback, £9.99. (Illustrated handbook to the sf TV series of the 1970s produced by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson; first edition.) April (?) 1994.

Gravel, Geary. **Batman: The Animated Movie, Mask of the Phantasm**. Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0936-1, 232pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy film novelization, first published in the USA, 1994; based on a screenplay by Alan Burnett, Paul Dini, Martin Pasko and Michael Reaves for the animated film directed by Eric Radomski and Bruce W. Timm; the text is copyright DC Comics.) April (?) 1994.

Gravel, Geary. **Dual to the Death**. "Batman: The Animated Series." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0951-5, 199pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy TV-series novelization, first published in the USA, 1994; the misspelling of "Duel" in the title seems to be a deliberate pun; we're not told who wrote the original scripts, or indeed whether the book is based on scripts and is not in fact an original spinoff; it's copyright DC Comics.) April (?) 1994.

Gravel, Geary. **Shadows of the Past**. "Batman: The Animated Series." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0946-9, 180pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy TV-series novelization, first published in the USA, 1994; other comments as for the preceding book.) April (?) 1994.

Harrison, Harry, and David Harris. **Bill, the Galactic Hero...The Final Incoherent Adventure**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05717-3, 215pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Pacella and Steve Fastner, £4.99. (Sf sharecrop novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 28th April 1994.

Kubasik, Christopher. **Poisoned Memories**. "Earth Dawn." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-451-45329-8, 313pp, A-format paperback, cover by Boris Vallejo, £3.99. (Shared-world fantasy novel, probably based on a role-playing game; first published in the USA, 1994; this is presumably the third in the "Earth Dawn" trilogy, although it doesn't actually say so anywhere on the book; this is the American first edition of March, "published by Roc, an imprint of Dutton Signet, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc.", with a British price sticker.) 28th April 1994.

Nazzaro, Joe. **The Making of Red Dwarf**. Photographs by Nobby Clark. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-023206-0, xi+95pp, very large-format paperback, £7.99. (Illustrated companion to the humorous sf TV series written by "Grant Naylor," first edition.) April (?) 1994.

Richards, Justin. **Theatre of War**. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20414-X, 316pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jeff Cummins, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition; its author's debut novel.) 19th May 1994.

Saberhagen, Fred. **Seance for a Vampire**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85562-1, 285pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Horror/crime novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's a sequel by another hand, of sorts, in which Sherlock Holmes and Dracula join forces, and Lenin and Rasputin make cameo appearances.) June 1994.

Stern, Roger. **The Death and Life of Superman**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40776-7, 478pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf comic-book novelization, first published in the USA, 1993; it's based on various recent DC comic-books which deal with the death and resurrection of the Man of Steel [created in the 1930s by Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster]; Stern is himself a comics writer, and this is his first novel.) 26th May 1994.

Tibballs, Geoff. **Randall & Hopkirk (Deceased)**. Foreword by Kenneth Cope. Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0915-9, 95pp, very large-format paperback, £9.99. (Illustrated handbook to the fantasy/crime TV series of the late 1960s produced by Monty Berman and Dennis Spooner; first edition.) April (?) 1994.

Westmore, Michael, and Joe Nazzaro. **The Official Star Trek The Next Generation Makeup FX Journal**. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-491-5, unpaginated, very large-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf television-series special-effects companion, first published in the USA, 1993.) 26th May 1994 (although it states in the book: "First Titan edition November 1993"; presumably it was delayed).

Yeovil, Jack. **Route 666**. "Dark Future." Boxtree, ISBN 1-85283-368-8, 245pp, A-format paperback, cover by Oliver Frey, £3.99. (Shared-world role-playing-game-inspired sf/fantasy novel, first edition; a prequel to the author's "Demon Download" trilogy; it shouldn't be confused with the Games Workshop-published anthology of the same title [edited by David Pringle, 1990]; what happened is that Boxtree invited "Jack Yeovil" [Kim Newman] to expand his story "Route 666" from that anthology into a full-length novel; the older book is likely to reappear under a new title, with a fresh Yeovil novelette replacing the previous one.) Late entry: March (?) publication, received in April 1994.

PEEPING TOM: "One of the jewels in the small press crown" — *Dementia 13*. "Bad shit for sad little horror wankers" — John Duffield, *Interzone*. "One in the eye for those who perceive such titles as ghettos for the sub-literate" — *The Dark Side*. **Decide for yourself.** Sample copy for 2x25p stamps from 15 Nottingham Road, Ashby, Leics. LE65 1DJ.

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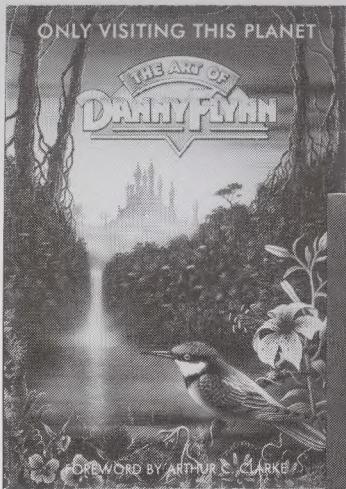
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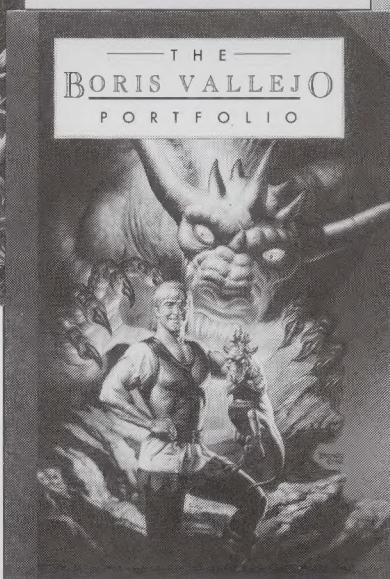
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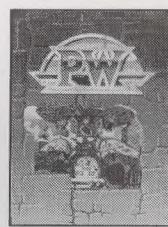
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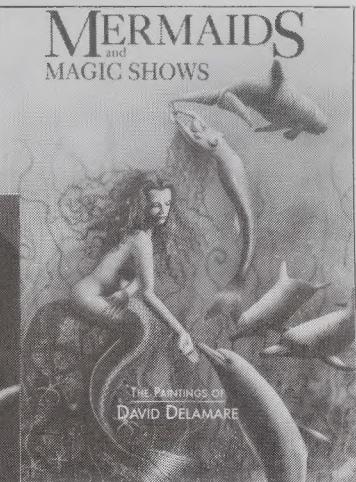
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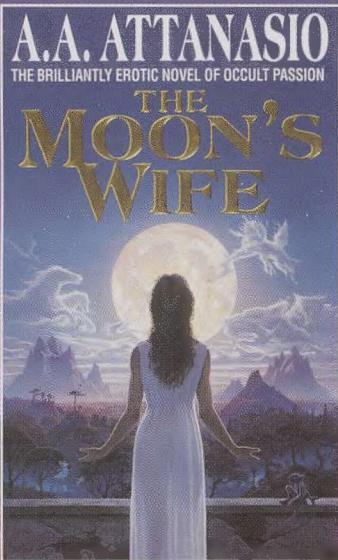
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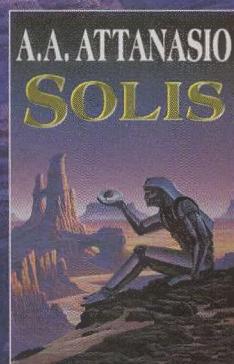
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